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02620

epic ILLUSTRATED

this issue:
special cover story
A MATTER OF VENGEANCE
plus:
THE LAST GALACTUS STORY

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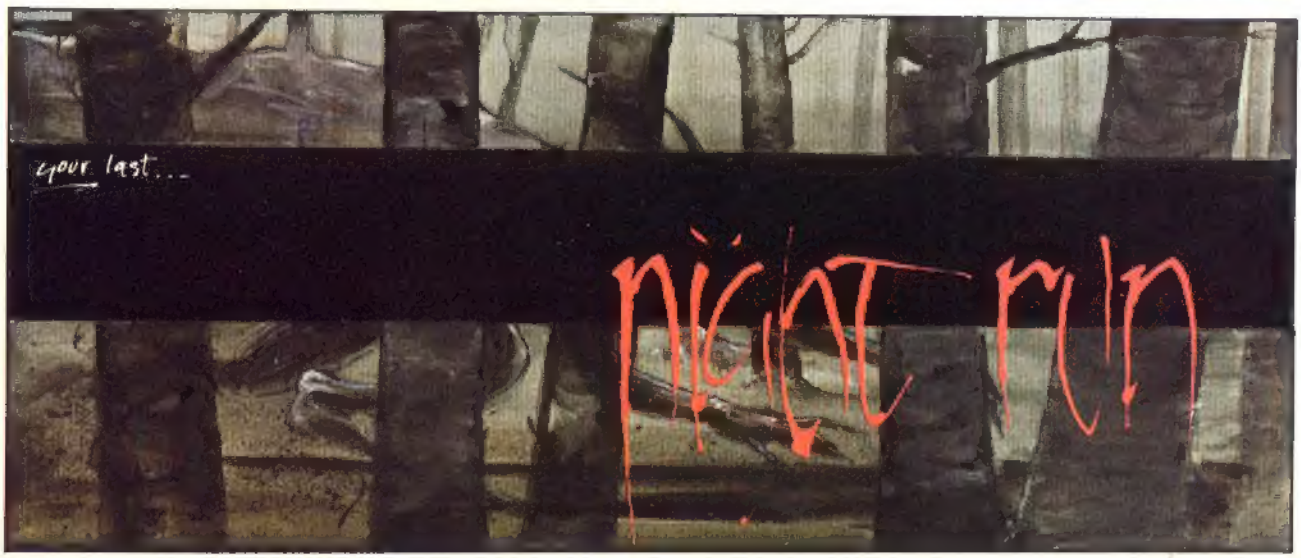
THE SMELL OF BLOOD MIGHT STIR THE KEEN-NOSED SCAVENGERS OF THE FOREST, IF THEY DID NOT FEAR THAT IT MIGHT BE THEIR OWN BLOOD IN THE END, THAT WARMED THE COLD EARTH.

NONE OF THE FOREST CREATURES WILL VENTURE FORTH THIS NIGHT, NOR ANY OTHER NIGHT WHEN THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS GLOWS ROUND.



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LOOK.

THE MOON HAS RISEN ONCE MORE.
OBEY ITS TWISTED HUMOR FOR
THE LAST TIME.

IT'S BEEN TOO LONG.
YOU'VE HURT SO MUCH.
WE'VE HURT SO MANY
AND STOLEN COUNTLESS SOULS
FOR YOUR HUNGER.

THE ONE WHOSE IMAGE ECHOES
IN OUR MEMORY.

BUT THERE IS ONE LIFE
YOU WILL NOT HAVE

THE OBJECT OF MY LUST.

...AND YOUR BLOODLUST.

MY NIGHTDREAM.

YOUR NIGHTMARE...
SHE MUST BE PROTECTED FROM YOU...
WE SHALL NEVER GO TO HER.

...HIS OBLIGATION.

FOR SOMEONE ELSE HAS COME FOR US!
A SHAMAN FROM THE COLD LANDS. A KILLER OF BEAST.
WHEN YOU WERE NOT UPON ME I SOUGHT HIM OUT. PAID HIM WELL.
HE HAS FOUND HIS MARK AND SHALL NOW FULFILL...

NIGHT RUN. A DARK SIDE OF ROMANTICISM.

END.

THE LAST GALACTUS STORY
CHAPTER FOUR:
THE RHYMING ROBOT
ON A PLANET SHE BELIEVES DEVOID OF SENTIENT LIFE, THE ONCE-HUMAN NOVA, HERALD OF GALACTUS, HEARS A VOICE ADDRESS HER -- IN ENGLISH!
WHO ON EARTH...?
ON EARTH 'TIS TRUE, FOR SUCH A NAME DID THESE SWEET ROLLING HILLS ONCE PROUDLY BEAR,
AS HOME AND CHERISHED REALM TO THAT GREAT RACE WHO WERE IN NATURE'S CROWN THE BRIGHTEST GEM.
WRITTEN & PENCILED BY JOHN BYRNE
INKED BY TERRY AUSTIN
LETTERED BY JIM NOVAK
COLORED BY GLYNIS WEIN

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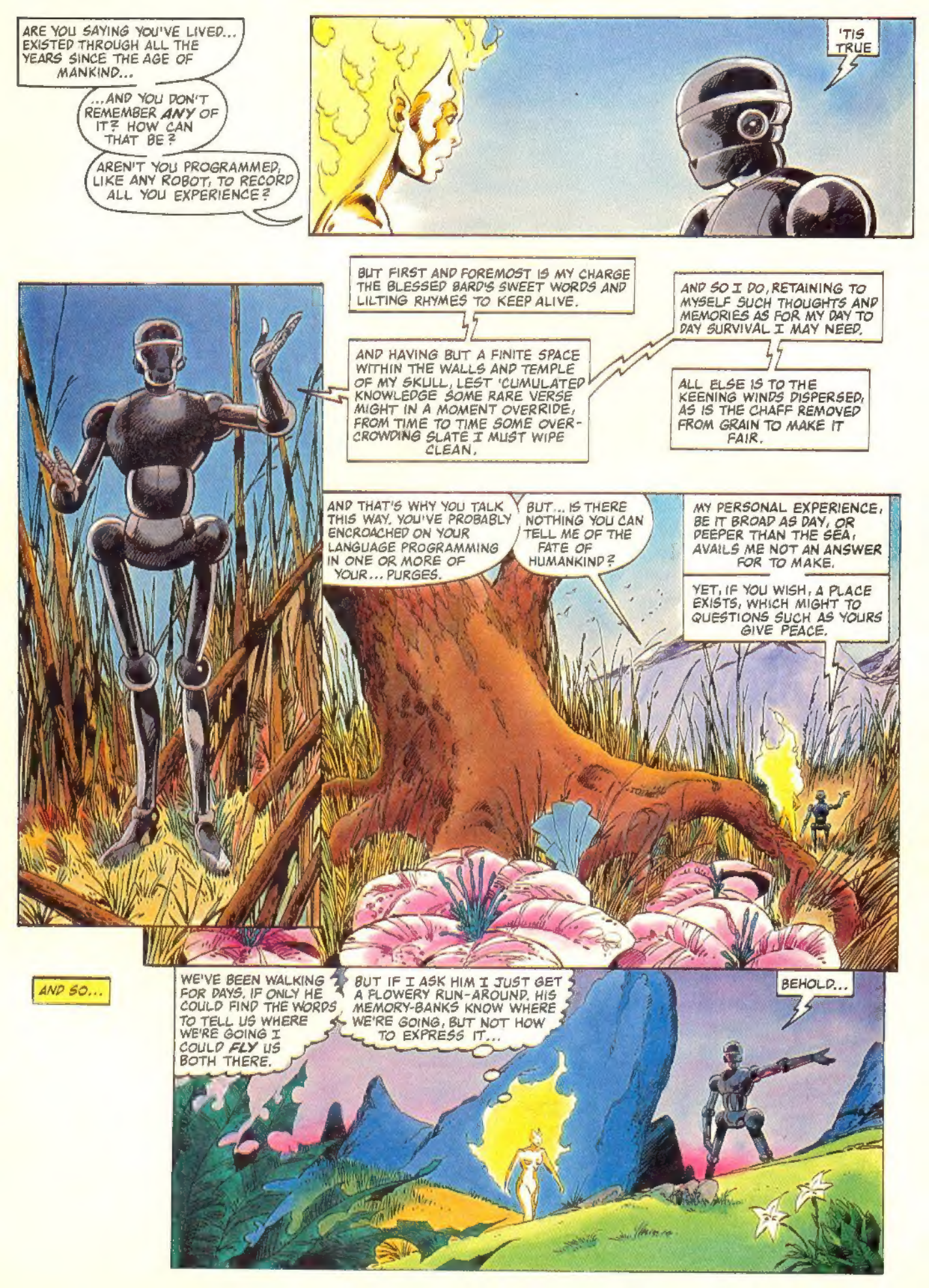
WHAT?!?
I BEG FORGIVENESS IF MY WORDS UPON THINE EAR DO STRANGELY FALL.
IN SOLITUDE FULL MANY YEARS UPON THIS VERDANT GLOBE MY YEARS HAVE ALL BEEN SPENT,
AND SIMPLE CONVERSATION, AS TWIXT ONE MAN AND ANOTHER MIGHT WITH GREATEST EASE UNFOLD,
HATH FOR ME, WITH ABSTINENCE OF USE GROWN STIFF AS OLD MEN'S KNEES,
AND DOES NOT TO THE TONGUE SO QUICKLY SPRING.
UNBELIEVABLE! A HUNDRED MILLION YEARS SINCE I LAST SET FOOT ON EARTH, AND THE FIRST... PERSON I ENCOUNTER IS A ROBOT TALKING IN SOMETHING LIKE IAMBIC PENTAMETER!
WHO ARE YOU FRIEND? WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
TO SUCH AS ME, IN ELDER DAYS, NO FASHION DID ARISE,
FOR GRANTING NAMES, SUCH AS TO HUMAN BABES THE FOND REMEMBRANCE OF THEIR FATHER'S LINE MIGHT CONJURE FORTH.
I AM BUT LIT-ROB 839, SUB-CATEGORY CLASSICAL, AND IN THESE WORDS IS ALL THE SPAN AND MEASURE OF MY SUBSTANCE THUS REVEALED.
"LIT-ROB?" SHORT FOR "LITERATURE-ROBOT," OBVIOUSLY. BUT... WHY ON EARTH WOULD ANYONE PROGRAM YOU TO SPEAK IN SUCH AN OUTMODED FASHION? I PRESUME YOU WERE ACTUALLY PROGRAMMED TO TALK THAT WAY?
IN TRUTH I CANNOT RIGHTLY SAY, FOR LONG HAVE BEEN THE YEARS SINCE FIRST THE LIGHT OF DAY THESE HUMBLE EYES BEHELD.
I KNOW THAT IN THE VAULTS, WHEREIN MY MEMORY DOTH LIE, ARE SAFELY STORED THE FULL AND VALUED WORDS OF THAT LONG-PARTED HUMAN WHOSE ANCIENT HAND DID GUIDE HIS QUILL IN STANZAS SUCH AS THESE.
HIS NAME WAS SHAKE-SPEARE, AND MY TRUST TO SAVE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS ALL HIS WORKS HAS BEEN.
TOWARD THAT END ALL KNOWLEDGE ELSE I HAVE THOUGHT MANY DAYS AND NIGHTS UNSLEEPING, ABOLISHED FROM MY HEART AND MIND, THE BETTER FOR MY LOFTY TRUST TO KEEP.


ARE YOU SAYING YOU'VE LIVED... EXISTED THROUGH ALL THE YEARS SINCE THE AGE OF MANKIND...
...AND YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANY OF IT? HOW CAN THAT BE?
AREN'T YOU PROGRAMMED, LIKE ANY ROBOT, TO RECORD ALL YOU EXPERIENCE?
'TIS TRUE
BUT FIRST AND FOREMOST IS MY CHARGE THE BLESSED BARD'S SWEET WORDS AND LILTING RHYMES TO KEEP ALIVE.
AND HAVING BUT A FINITE SPACE WITHIN THE WALLS AND TEMPLE OF MY SKULL, LEST 'CUMULATED KNOWLEDGE SOME RARE VERSE MIGHT IN A MOMENT OVERRIDE, FROM TIME TO TIME SOME OVER-CROWDING SLATE I MUST WIPE CLEAN.
AND SO I DO, RETAINING TO MYSELF SUCH THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES AS FOR MY DAY TO DAY SURVIVAL I MAY NEED.
ALL ELSE IS TO THE KEENING WINDS DISPERSED, AS IS THE CHAFF REMOVED FROM GRAIN TO MAKE IT FAIR.
AND THAT'S WHY YOU TALK THIS WAY. YOU'VE PROBABLY ENCROACHED ON YOUR LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING IN ONE OR MORE OF YOUR... PURGES.
BUT... IS THERE NOTHING YOU CAN TELL ME OF THE FATE OF HUMANKIND?
MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, BE IT BROAD AS DAY, OR DEEPER THAN THE SEA, AVAILS ME NOT AN ANSWER FOR TO MAKE.
YET, IF YOU WISH, A PLACE EXISTS, WHICH MIGHT TO QUESTIONS SUCH AS YOURS GIVE PEACE.
AND SO...
WE'VE BEEN WALKING FOR DAYS. IF ONLY HE COULD FIND THE WORDS TO TELL US WHERE WE'RE GOING I COULD FLY US BOTH THERE.
BUT IF I ASK HIM I JUST GET A FLOWERY RUN-AROUND. HIS MEMORY-BANKS KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING, BUT NOT HOW TO EXPRESS IT...
BEHOLD...

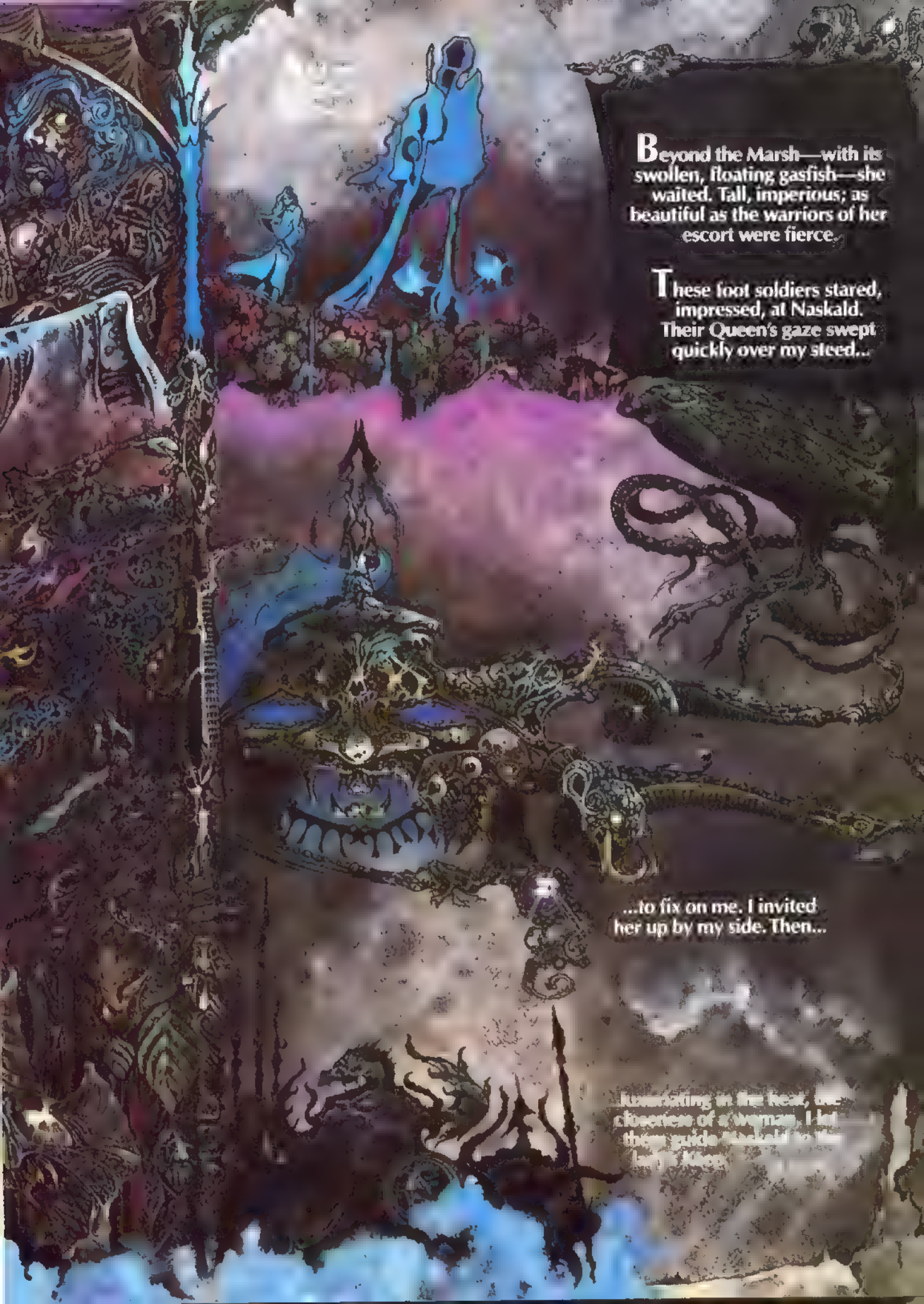
A CITY... 2!
BUT..
RUINED. AND IT MIGHT IN ANY CASE, BE AN ALIEN PLANET IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE I WAS TRULY HUMAN.
AND IT'S OBVIOUS MANKIND EVOLVED INTO SOMETHING THAT HAD LITTLE IN COMMON WITH THE GIRL I USED TO BE.
IN ELDER DAYS WHEN STILL THE BUILDER'S ART WAS HELD AS WORTHY IN THE MANY TRADES OF MAN, THIS PLACE WAS SUMMONED OUT OF EMPTY A.R., SO CLOSE TO MATTERS MAGICAL HAD LATELY COME THE TALENTS OF THAT ART.
IT'S COMFORTING TO KNOW MY ANCESTORS OR RATHER, THEIR DESCENDANTS SURVIVED SOME OF THE POTENTIAL HORRORS THEY WERE PREPARED TO UNLEASH ON THEMSELVES..
LONG ENOUGH TO CREATE SOMETHING LIKE THIS. I'M GOING TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK...
I SHOULD FEEL SAD, I SUPPOSE. KNOWING THAT EVERYONE I KNEW AND LOVED IS GONE, DEAD AND DUST FOR A HUNDRED MILLION YEARS...
BUT I'VE SEEN THE DEATH AND DESTRUCTION OF TOO MANY WORLDS, TOO MANY RACES. I SERVE THE GREAT DEVOURER, GALACTUS, AND HE...
NOVA!

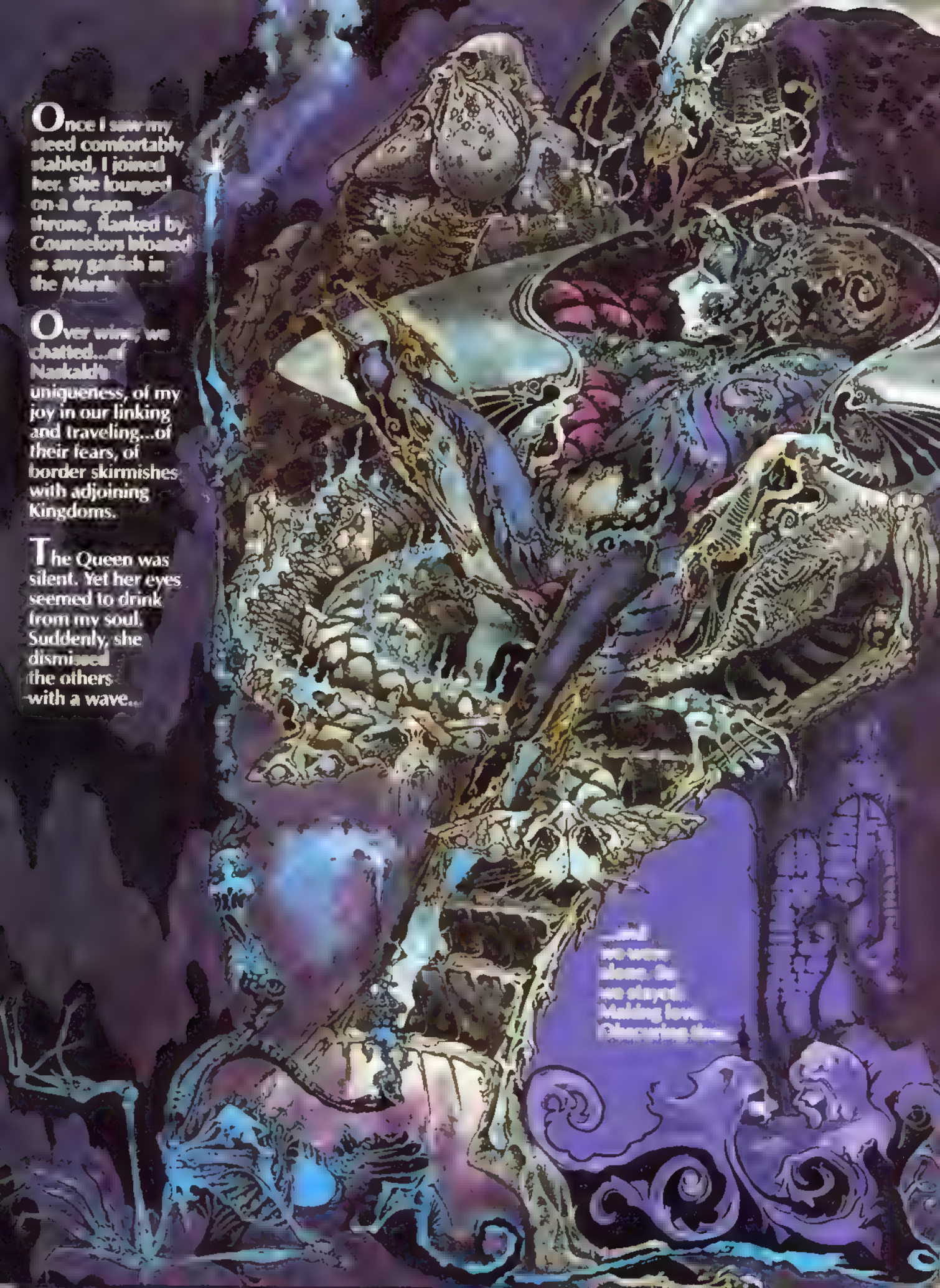
MY MASTER CALLS.
ACROSS THE BOUNDLESS GULF SHE STREAKS ONCE MORE, HOMING UNERRINGLY ON THE GREAT STAR-SPHERE AS IT ROLLS INTO EASY ORBIT ABOUT THE BRIGHT BLUE-GREEN BAUBLE, EARTH.
NOVA IS HERE, MASTER WHAT IS YOUR COMMAND?
I AM... TROUBLED MY HERALD I KNOW THIS WORLD TO BE THE PLANET MEN CALL EARTH...
YET MY SCANS CAN FIND NO TRACE OF THE INHABITANTS. WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD, NOVA?
WHERE ARE THOSE FEW MORTALS GALACTUS ONCE DARED NAME FRIENDS?

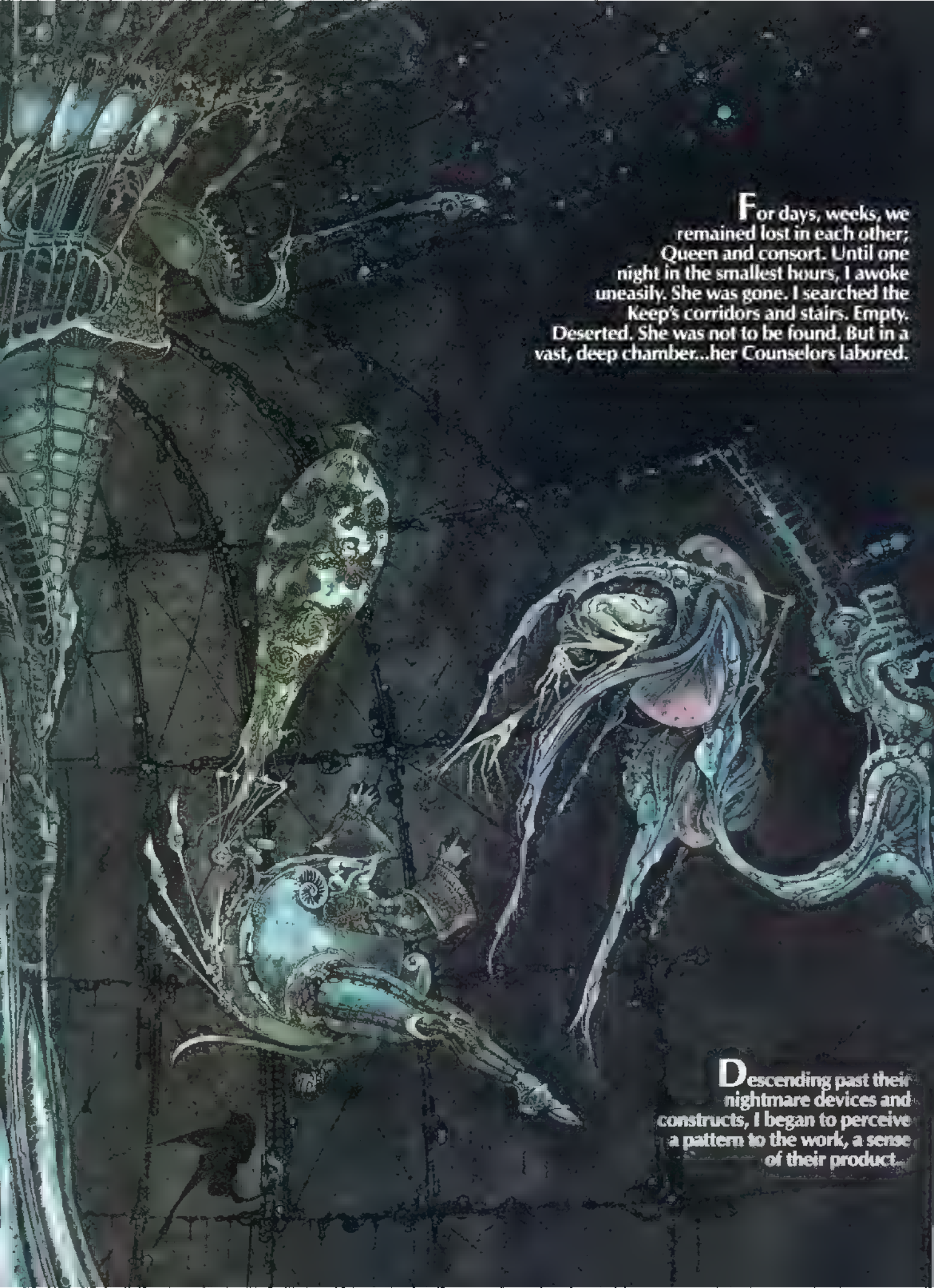
MASTER. ? DO YOU JEST ? THEY WERE MORTALS AS YOU HAVE SAID. THEY ARE LONG SINCE..
DEAD ?
YES YES OF COURSE I HAD... FORGOTTEN... HOW FLEETING ARE THE LIVES OF MEN ALL HUMAN HISTORY BUT A SINGLE TICK OF THE GREAT COSMIC CLOCK.
YOUR OWN EXTENDED LIFESPAN S MY DOING YET SOMEHOW... SOMEHOW I HAD HOPED YOUR FELLOW EARTHLINGS...
BUT A HUNDRED MILLION YEARS WAS TOO LONG .. TOO LONG
ENOUGH! IF THOSE I ONCE NAMED FRIENDS POSSESS THIS WORLD NO LONGER I AM AT LAST FREE OF MY ANCIENT OATH!
IN ALL THE UNIVERSE THERE TURNS NO WORLD WHOSE ESSENCE IS AS STRONG AS THAT OF EARTH.
HERE IS A PLANET THAT ONCE BROUGHT FORTH A RACE OF SUPERMEN, AND HERE, TOO, IS A PLANET WHOSE SIREN CALL HAS LONG TORMENTED ME, GOADING ME IN MY ETERNAL HUNGER
ONLY THE POWER OF MY OATH, AND MY FRIENDSHIP WITH A HANDFUL OF HUMANS HAS SAVED THIS PLANET FOR SO LONG.
THAT TIME IS PAST, AND FINALLY I MAY PLUCK FROM ITS VINE THIS SWEET AND MOST TEMPTING FRUIT.
GALACTUS IS THE GREAT DEVOURER. NOW LET GALACTUS FEED!

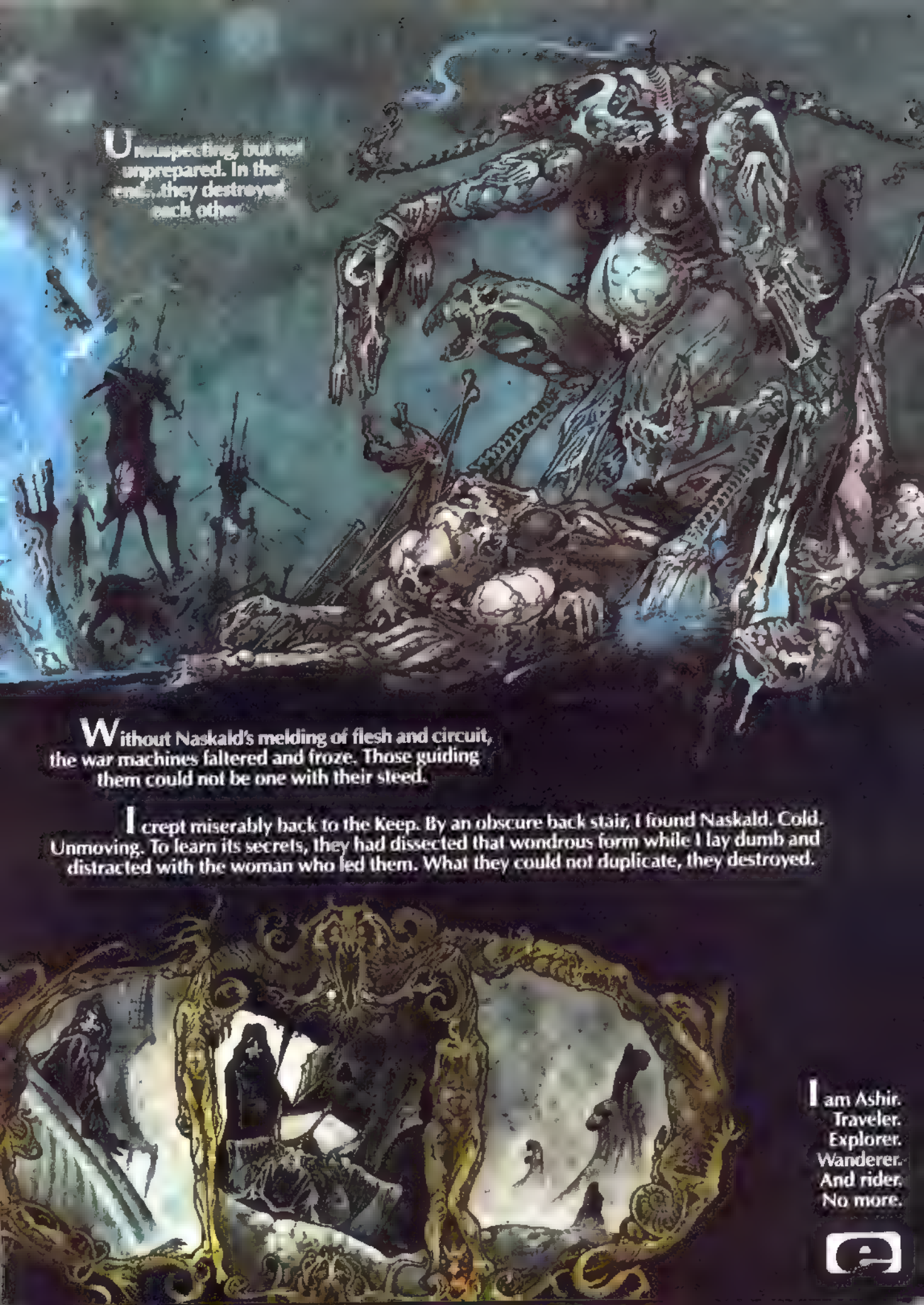
TO BE CONTINUED

Rider
I am Ashir.
Traveler.
Explorer.
Wanderer.
Within the hollowed back of Naskald, my great steed of flesh and circuitry, I ride. And riding, we are one. Together we cross this ancient earth's sundered lands. Together we discover wonder.


Beyond the Marsh—with its swollen, floating gasfish—she waited. Tall, imperious; as beautiful as the warriors of her escort were fierce.
These foot soldiers stared, impressed, at Naskald. Their Queen's gaze swept quickly over my steed...
...to fix on me. I invited her up by my side. Then...


Once I saw my steed comfortably stabled, I joined her. She lounged on a dragon throne, flanked by Counselors bloated as any goldfish in the Marsh.
Over wine, we chatted...of Nankaldh uniqueness, of my joy in our linking and traveling...of their fears, of border skirmishes with adjoining Kingdoms.
The Queen was silent. Yet her eyes seemed to drink from my soul. Suddenly, she dismissed the others with a wave...

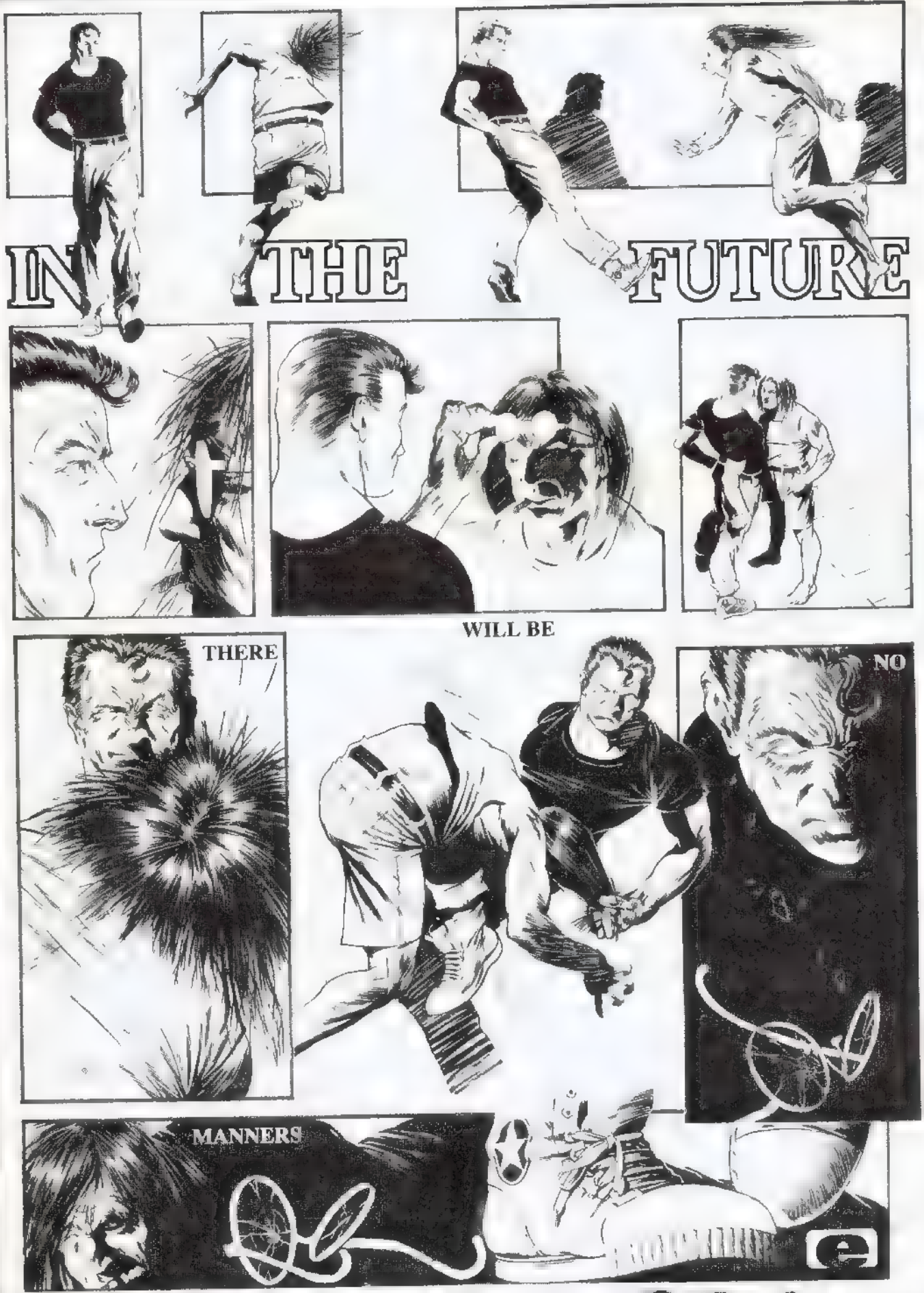

For days, weeks, we remained lost in each other; Queen and consort. Until one night in the smallest hours, I awoke uneasily. She was gone. I searched the Keep's corridors and stairs. Empty. Deserted. She was not to be found. But in a vast, deep chamber...her Counselors labored.
Descending past their nightmare devices and constructs, I began to perceive a pattern to the work, a sense of their product...

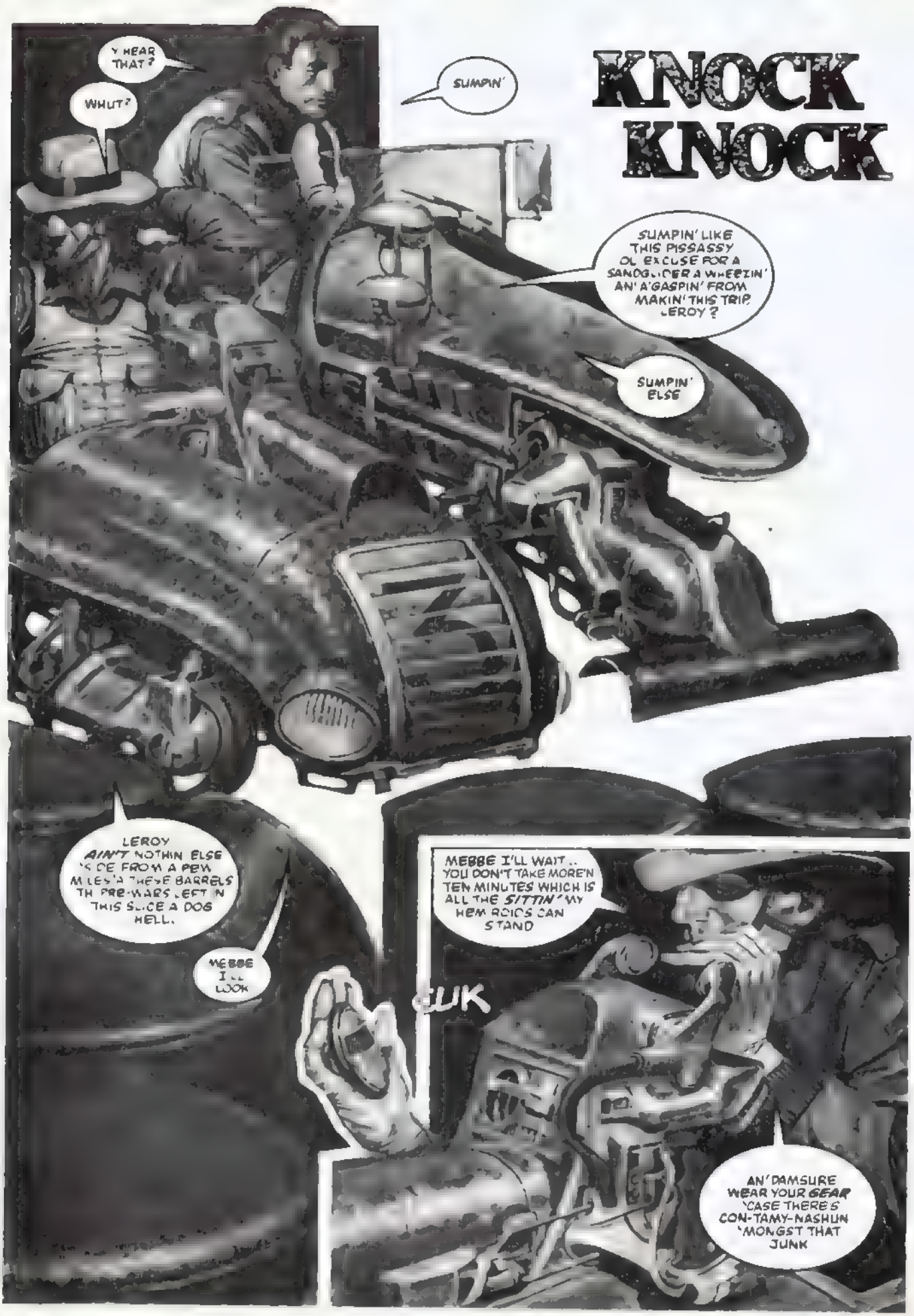


Without Naskald's melding of flesh and circuit, the war machines faltered and froze. Those guiding them could not be one with their steed.

I crept miserably back to the Keep. By an obscure back stair, I found Naskald. Cold. Unmoving. To learn its secrets, they had dissected that wondrous form while I lay dumb and distracted with the woman who led them. What they could not duplicate, they destroyed.

I am Ashir.
Traveler.
Explorer.
Wanderer.
And rider.
No more.


IN THE FUTURE
WILL BE
THERE
NO
MANNERS


KNOCK KNOCK
Y HEAR THAT?
WHUT?
SUMPIN'
SUMPIN' LIKE THIS PISSASSY OL EXCUSE FOR A SANDGLIDER A WHEEZIN' AN' A'GASPIN' FROM MAKIN' THIS TRIP LEROY?
SUMPIN' ELSE
LEROY AIN'T NOTHIN ELSE 'S OF FROM A PEW MILES'A THESE BARRELS TH PRE-WARS LEFT IN THIS SLICE A DOG HELL.
MEBBE I LL LOOK
MEBBE I'LL WAIT .. YOU DON'T TAKE MORE'N TEN MINUTES WHICH IS ALL THE SITTIN' MY HEM ROIDS CAN STAND
CLUK
AN' DAMSURE WEAR YOUR GEAR 'CASE THERE'S CON-TAMY-NASHUN 'MONGST THAT JUNK

© 1985 Phil Hale

SNAP
BET CON-TAMY-NASHUN DON'T SMELL NO WORSE N TH' INSIDE'A THIS OL' MASK.
LEROY, I SWEAR THEY BOUND Y' BRAINS AT BIRTH AN' THEY AIN'T GROWED NONE SINCE.
GOT BRAINS 'NUFF T' KNOW I HATE A' WEARIN' AN' A' LUGGIN' ALL THIS CRAP.
T-CHAC
LEROY, Y'DID TH' LISSENIN; Y'CAN DO TH' LOOKIN'--
--BUT Y'GAWDAMWELL CAN DO IT BY REGULASHUNS. Y'AIN'T BRINGIN' BACK ANY CON-TAMY-NASHUN T'GET ON ME.
WELL, MEBBE IF I FIND SUMPIN' GOOD--LIKE BOOZE'R FOOD'R WIMMEN--I'LL JUST KEEP IT FOR M'SELF SO IT DON'T CON-TAMY-NATE YOU.
I PURELY HATE A LUGGIN' ALL THIS CRAP.

SURE AIN'T SHARIN' WITH NOBODY MAKES Y' LUG ALL THIS CRAP
KNOCK KNOCK
HUH?
THAT'S IT! NOW LE'SEE JUST WHAT TH'--
--HELL?
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
KNOCK KNOCK
SWEET HOLY SHIT!
POIT!

MRRGHHMMMMM
LEROY...?
TIME'S UP, LEROY. WHERE Y'AT, BOY?
LEROY, IF YOU FOUND SUMPIN' AN' RE TRYIN' T'HOLD OUT ON ME...
KNOCK KNOCK
WHUT TH'F--?! MUS' BE WHUT THAT BONEHEAD HEARD. WELL, LEROY, SINCE YOU GOOFIN' OFF, LOOKS LIKE IT'S GONNA BE ALL MINE!
HEE HEE
KNOCK KNOCK

DR. WATCHSTOP
"IN SEARCH OF ANCIENT MYTHS"
YOU'LL SEE THE MARKERS JUST UP AHEAD.
YOU MEAN THOSE? THOSE BLOCKS DOWN THERE?
YES, INDEED! HUNDREDS OF THEM, ALL LESS THAN ONE METER HIGH, YET VERY PROMINENT ON THIS FLAT, BARREN PLAIN.

© 1985 Ken Macklin

SEE THERE... NOTICE THE PATTERNS IN WHICH THEY'RE ARRANGED! IT ONLY BECOMES CLEAR FROM THIS HEIGHT!
FOOTBALL FIELDS OF THE GODS?
SERIOUSLY, NOW! THERE IS NO NATURAL EXPLANATION FOR THE CONFIGURATIONS OF THESE BLOCKS... ONLY THE INTERVENTION OF ANIMATE, INTELLIGENT LIFE COULD BE RESPONSIBLE!
BUT, PROFESSOR, THERE'S NO EVIDENCE OF SAPIENT LIFE ON THIS PLANET! WHO MIGHT HAVE DONE IT? OTHER VISITORS FROM THE STARS?

PERHAPS... BUT WE'LL NEED TO COLLECT MORE INFORMATION, AND RIGHT NOW WE'RE LOW ON FUEL!
I'LL HEAD BACK TO THE STATION, PROFESSOR. GOSH, WHAT A MYSTERY! MAYBE THEY WERE ONCE PLACED TO GUIDE LANDING SPACESHIPS!
HEY DAD... LITTLE BROTHER KEEPS GETTING OUT OF LINE!

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE
©1984 Rick Veitch
AS IF YOU NEVER BUSTED THEIRS...
SOMEONE'S GOT TO DO IT! COMES DOWN TO THE NITTY GRITTY, ALL THE PROGRAMMING THEY GET ISN'T WORTH ONE MINUTE OF REAL COMBAT EXPERIENCE...
BUT WITH THE RIGHT BREAKING IN, THESE NEW ISSUES CAN BECOME FIRST CLASS FIGHTING DROYDS!
AWRIGHT, YOU RUSTBUCKETS! TAKE FIVE--BUT STAY TUNED ON ALL WAVELENGTHS!
THIS IS HOSTILE TERRITORY!
PUT A LID ON IT, QUID! THERE ARE NO SERGEANTS IN THIS ARMY!
THIS IS CRAZY, QUID.
WE NEVER SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT NEW ISSUES THIS FAR BEHIND ENEMY LINES..
DON'T BUST MY CHIPS, SKRIM...
EXPERIENCE MEANS RANK TO THESE NEW ISSUES. YOU'VE BEEN AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT.
I BEEN AROUND SO LONG I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ANYMORE.
UH, QUID, SKRIM? I'M DING...
UH... COULD I... LIKE, ASK YOU GUYS SOME QUESTIONS?

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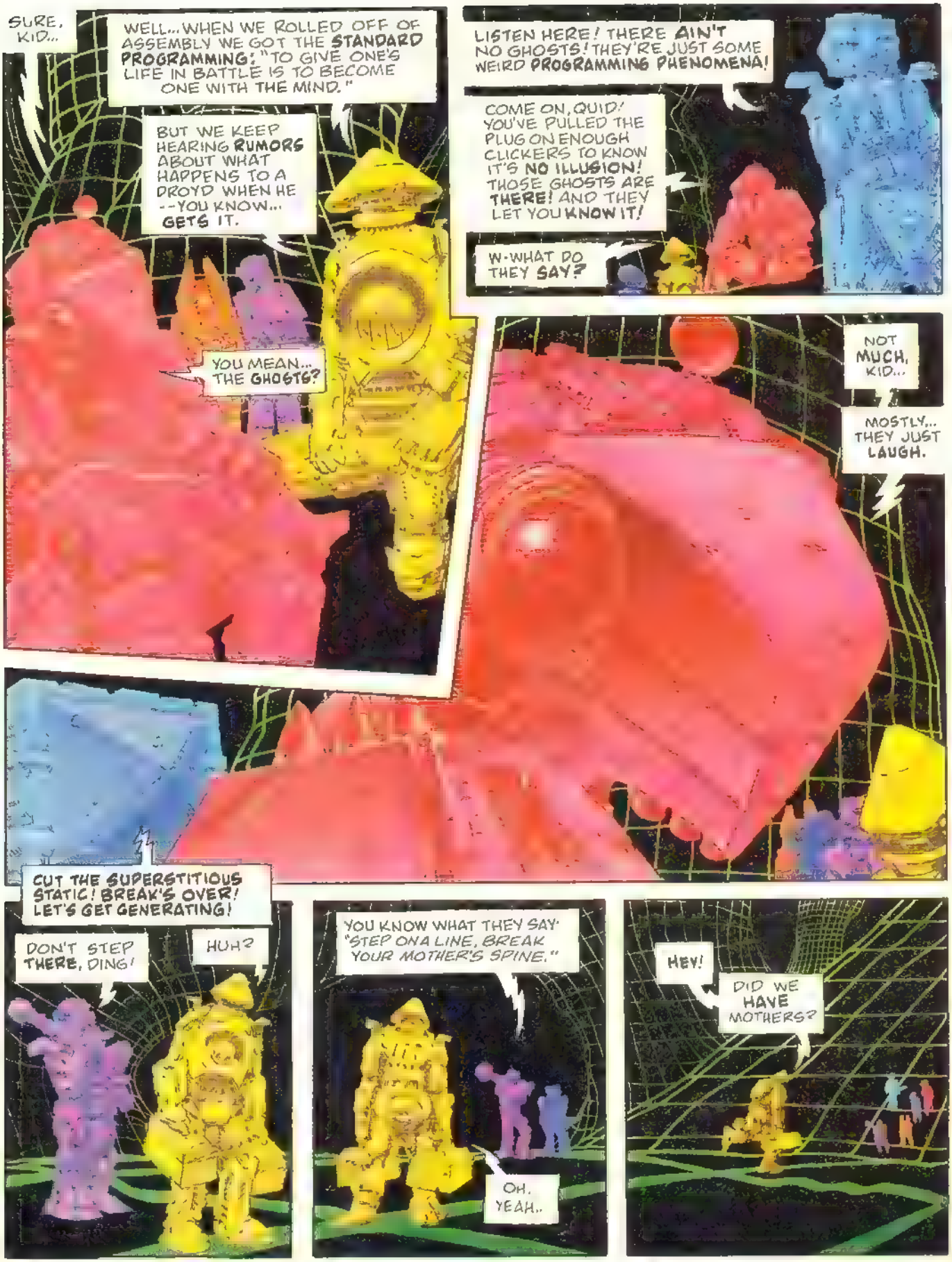

SURE, KID...
WELL... WHEN WE ROLLED OFF OF ASSEMBLY WE GOT THE STANDARD PROGRAMMING, "TO GIVE ONE'S LIFE IN BATTLE IS TO BECOME ONE WITH THE MIND."
BUT WE KEEP HEARING RUMORS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO A DROYD WHEN HE --YOU KNOW... GETS IT.
YOU MEAN... THE GHOSTS?
LISTEN HERE! THERE AIN'T NO GHOSTS! THEY'RE JUST SOME WEIRD PROGRAMMING PHENOMENA!
COME ON, QUID! YOU'VE PULLED THE PLUG ON ENOUGH CLICKERS TO KNOW IT'S NO ILLUSION! THOSE GHOSTS ARE THERE! AND THEY LET YOU KNOW IT!
W-WHAT DO THEY SAY?
NOT MUCH, KID...
MOSTLY... THEY JUST LAUGH.
CUT THE SUPERSTITIOUS STATIC! BREAK'S OVER! LET'S GET GENERATING!
DON'T STEP THERE, DING!
HUH?
YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY: "STEP ON A LINE, BREAK YOUR MOTHER'S SPINE."
OH, YEAH..
HEY!
DID WE HAVE MOTHERS?

EVERYBODY FLATTEN!
SKRIMS GOT SOMETHING ON HIS SCOPES..
SOUNDS LIKE A CLICKER SKUDWAGON SWEEPING UP SALVAGE...
IT'LL BE GOOD! YOU CHARGE THE DISRUPTOR I'LL SET UP THE FIELD--
EVERYBODY OUT IN THE OPEN--MOVE IT!
YOU CAN'T ASK US TO GO OUT THERE! THAT SKJDDER WILL LICK US UP LIKE IRON FILINGS!
NOT IF YOU CAN MANAGE A LITTLE TRICK THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN PROGRAMMING...
FULL INTERFACE MODE! LOCK YOUR GENERATORS IN AT 100 PERCENT!
IT'S A SIMPLE ANTI-MAG FIELD. AND IT WILL STALL THEIR MAIN DYNAMO JUST LONG ENOUGH TO GET A SHOT IN WITH THE DISRUPTOR!
WHATEVER YOU DO-- DON'T LET GO!
NO SWEAT! THEY CAN'T PICK US UP BENEATH THIS OVERHANG!
WE CAN SIT TIGHT AND..
FAT CHANCE!
WHAT DO YOU SAY WE BRING THAT SUCKER DOWN, SKRIM?
THERE'S ONLY ONE SHOT LEFT ON THE DISRUPTOR...
YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE IT COUNT!
SKRIM-- IS THAT DISRUPTOR CHARGED?
OH, MOTHER..

IT'S NO USE! OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO ANCHOR IN!
NO!
AARG!
YOU FOOL!
THE KID'S CRACKIN'! WE'VE GOT TO BRING IT DOWN, QUID--
NOW!
THE DISRUPTOR'S NOT FULLY CHARGED! ONE MORE SECOND..
IT'S TOO LATE-- THEY'RE GONE!
CLICKER BASTARDS!
SKREEE
AAWWKK
YOU GOT IT! SHE'S GOING OVER!
B-BUT WE LOST THE WHOLE TROOP! I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO YOU, SKRIM!
THE PULL-- IT'S TOO STRONG! WE'LL NEVER HOLD!
HANG ON, DING!
WE CAN DO IT!

NO TIME TO CRY OVER SPILT FLUID, QUID... THIS IS WAR, REMEMBER?
AND THESE FIREWORKS WILL BRING EVERY CLICKER IN THE MACHINE DOWN ON OUR NECKS! LET'S SKATE BACK TO OUR OWN LINES!
WAIT A SECOND..
I HEAR SOMETHING..
GO AWAY... PLEASE GO AWAY... I-I'M SORRY I KILLED YOU!
GHOST?
NAW! IT'S ON NORMAL WAVELENGTHS
ONE OF THE NEW ISSUES MUST STILL BE BROADCASTING!
LEAVE ME ALONE!
I DIDN'T MEAN TO FAIL YOU!
IT'S DING!
OF ALL THE ONES TO MAKE IT!
WHO YOU TALKING TO KID? YOUR BUDDIES ARE LONG GONE!
N-NO! THEY WERE HERE! I HEARD THEIR VOICES..
LAUGHING AND HOWLING! TAUNTING ME... IT WAS HORRIBLE!
YOU BETTER THANK YOUR LUCKY STARS ALL YER HEARING IS PROGRAMMING ILLUSIONS! IF YOUR BUDDIES WERE HERE I IMAGINE THEY'D DO MORE THAN LAUGH AT YOU!
QUID! I'M GETTING SOMETHING ON THE SCOPE! COULD BE A CLICKER TROOP CARRIER.

CLICKER SHOCK TROOPS! DAMN! WE'RE CUT OFF FROM THE CENTER!
WE'RE BEING PUSHED RIGHT UP TO THE GRIDWALL!
I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, QUID--
WE NOT ONLY HAVE OUR BACKS TO THE WALL...
WE'RE IN THE PROVERBIAL CORNER, TOO!
BLASTED LUCK! AND THERE'S NO WAY AROUND THEM!
WE NEED A PLAN, SKRIM-- SOMETHING ORIGINAL!
TRY THIS ON FOR SIZE...
WE GO THROUGH THE GRID WALL...!
ARE YOU CRAZY? AIN'T NOTHING OUT THERE! IT'S JUST A VOID-- WE'D DIE!
I DON'T WANT TO DIE!!
CLICKERS DON'T TAKE PRISONERS ANYMORE THAN WE DO.
IT'S THE ONE PLACE THEY WON'T DARE FOLLOW...
BUT IT GOES AGAINST MY MOST BASIC PROGRAMMING!
I CAN'T MAKE MYSELF DO IT!
DIE, GRIPPIE SWINE!
LOOKOUT!
OOOF!
EAT RAILGUN, CLICKER!
I'M HIT... I'M HIT..
OH SHIIIT..

HOW BAD DID HE GET YOU, SKRIM?
GENERATING CIRCUITS ARE SHOT... I CAN WALK BUT I CAN'T MAKE POWER...
I'M ONLY FUNCTIONEL AS LONG AS MY BATTERIES HOLD UP,..
IF WE GET A CHANCE TO INTERFACE, I CAN FEED YOU POWER--
W-WHAT'S THAT?
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA YOU'RE BLIND, YOU FOOLS! WE WERE ALL SO BLIND! HA HA
CLICKER GHOST.
HAHAHA NOW I CAN SEE! AND IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL!! HA HAHA
HA HA THEY'RE CALLING ME. HAHA
I HEAR YOU.. I'M COMING...
HAH AHA!
WHAT NOW?
PARTICLE BEAM TRYING TO FINGER US.!!

WE'RE BOXED, SKRIM! WHAT DO WE DO...?
I'M ALREADDY RUNNINNG LOWW ON POWERRR...
THE WALL, QUID! ITS ALLL WE'VE GOT!
NOT THROUGH THERE! THAT'S WHERE THE GHOSTS ARE! NOOOO!
TO HELL WITH THE GHOSTS! GO!
OOO IDD!
NOOOO!
WE RE OUT!
THEY'RRE NOT COMMINNG AFTERR USS...
YOU'RE DEAD, GRIPPIES!
ENJOY THE VOID!
GIVE OUR REGARDS TO THE GHOSTS!
CAN YOU BLAME 'EM?
I MEAN--TO BE OUT HERE WITHOUT THE GRID UNDER US... IT MAKES ME FEEL WEIRD IN MY SOCKETS!
BUT, W-WE'RE ON SOLID GROUND, AREN'T WE? I CAN FEEL MY FEET DRAGGING OVER IT...
ONLY... MY LEGS ARE GONE--
HOW CAN THAT BE, GUYS..?
I CAN FEEL THEM, JUST LIKE THEY WERE STILL ATTACHED... BUT...
MERELY A "PROGRAMMINNG ILLUSIONNN.."
VERY FUNNY, SKRIM!
HAHAHAHAHA
IT SOUNDS LIKE OUR GHOST FRIENDS THINK SO, TOO...
C'MON-- LET'S TRY OVER THIS WAY--

SKRIM -- I'M LOSING MY BEARINGS OUT HERE! WHICH WAY IS THE GRID?
DONN'T KNOW. MUSSSTT HAVVVVE POWERRR, NOWWW...
THE GHOSTS-- THEY'RE FOLLOWING US!
SKRIM! QUID! DING!
HEBB ME..
SOON YOU'LL BE WITH US!
HYENAS! I'D BLAST YOU IF I COULD ONLY SEE YOU!
HEELLPP! THEY GOT ME! THEY GOT MY LEGS! DON'T LET 'EM TAKE ME-- ANYTHING BUT THAT!
YOU'RE FIRST, D NG
PLEASE, QUID--
AAAOOOWWGH!
THIS IS OUR WAY OF THANKING YOU, DING
AAAOOOGHH!
SKRIM! I'LL FEED YOU SOME POWER WHILE THEY'RE BUSY WITH HIM! WE'LL GET OUT OF THIS...
SKRIM-- WHERE ARE YOU?
MIND HAVE MERCY... NOT YOU, SKRIM...
.. NOT YOU...?

W-WE FOUGHT SIDE BY SIDE SINCE WE WERE NEW ISSUES...
YOU SAVED MY RATCHET MORE TIMES THAN I-- ;CHOKE!
WHY, QUID... I NEVER KNEW YOU CARED...
HAHAHA
SKRIM? IS THAT YOU?
B-BUT... YOU'RE DEAD...
WRONG, QUID... I'M ALIVE! MORE ALIVE THAN I'VE BEEN IN A LONG TIME!
HAHAHA
THE WHOLE SQUAD IS HERE..
WE WANT TO TAKE YOU WITH US...
AND FOR THAT YOU HAVE TO BE DISASSEMBLED!
N-NO--GET AWAY FROM ME..
I DON'T WANT TO DIE...
YOU'VE FORGOTTEN WHAT LIES BURIED UNDER THE ARMOR YOU WEAR..
HAHAHAHAHA
WHEN YOU SEE, YOU'LL BE LAUGHING AS HYSTERICALLY AS WE ARE..
NO! YOU'RE LYING...
YOU'RE NOT REAL!
KLIK!
Y-YOU'RE JUST A PROGRAMMING PHENOMENA!
POP!
WE WANT TO HEAR YOU LAUGH, QUID..

HE'S COMING OUT OF IT..
QUID-- ITS ME-- SKRIM! THIS IS WHAT I LOOKED LIKE BEFORE I WAS ENCASED IN THAT ANDROID BODY!
WE WERE TERRORISTS, QUID..
THE AUTHORITIES PROGRAMMED US TO WORK OUT OUR AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES IN THE MACHINE, SO WE'D BE FIT TO REJOIN SOCIETY!
IS YOUR MEMORY RETURNING?
NOW ITS OVER! WE CAN ENJOY LIFE AS REAL HUMAN BEINGS AGAIN... YOU AND I, TOGETHER.. JUST LIKE I USED TO BE..
I'VE HAD ENOUGH KILLING TO LAST A LIFETIME, QUID..
HAVEN'T YOU...?

"PROGRAMMING PHENOMENA."

© 1985 Zoran Vanjaka

هَلْ رَأَيْتَ ؟ فَارِسٌ مَسِيحِيٌّ

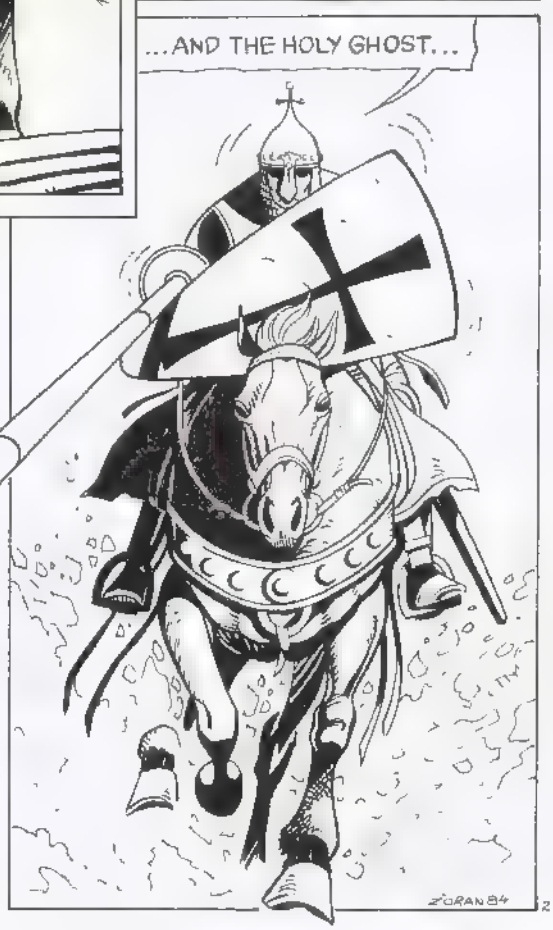
THEY ARE FIVE! THAT WILL DO... WITH THE HELP OF THE FATHER AND THE SON...

إِنَّهُ وَاحِدٌ.

إِلَى الهِجَامِ.

إِلَى الهِجَامِ

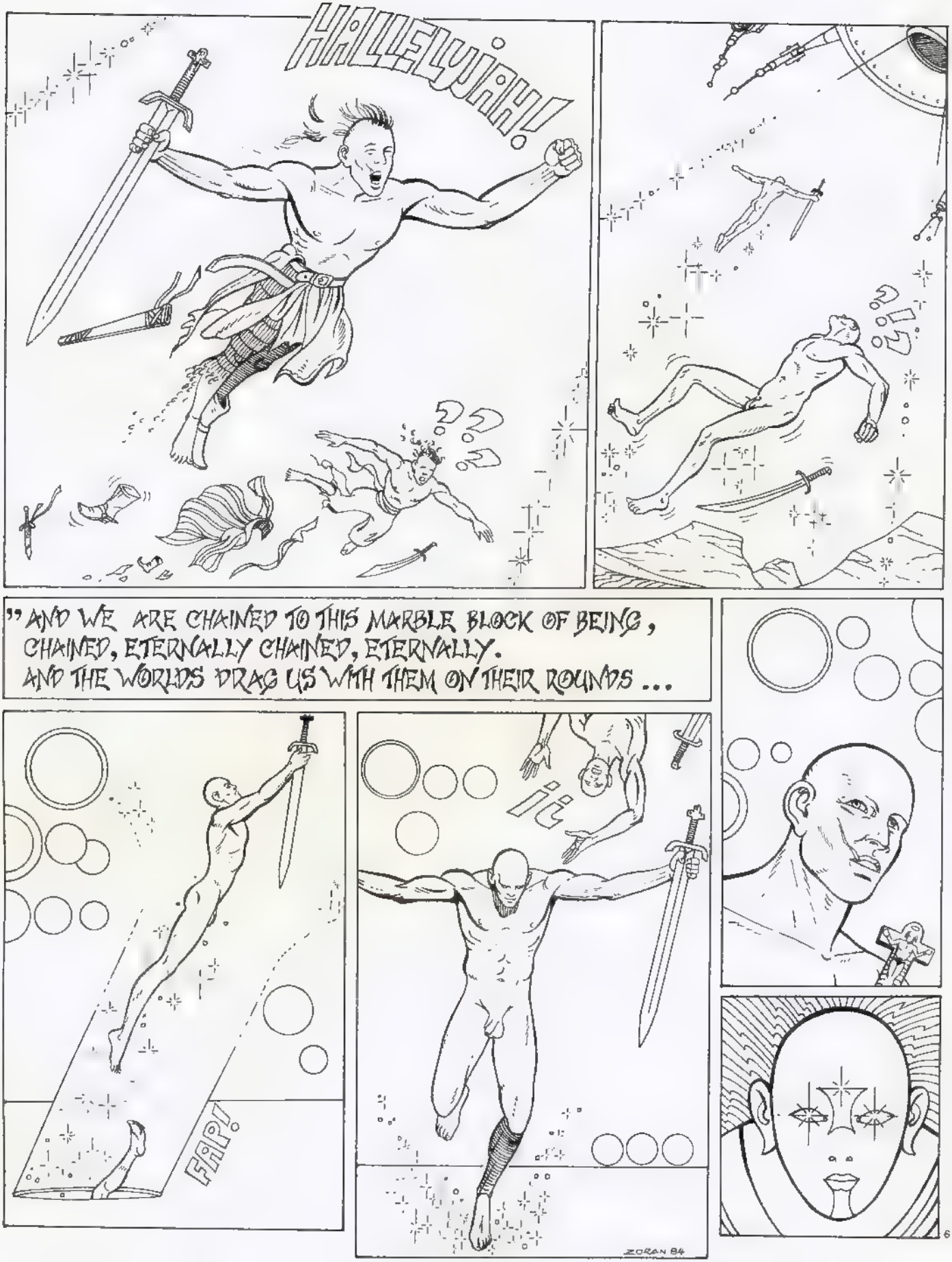
...AND THE HOLY GHOST...



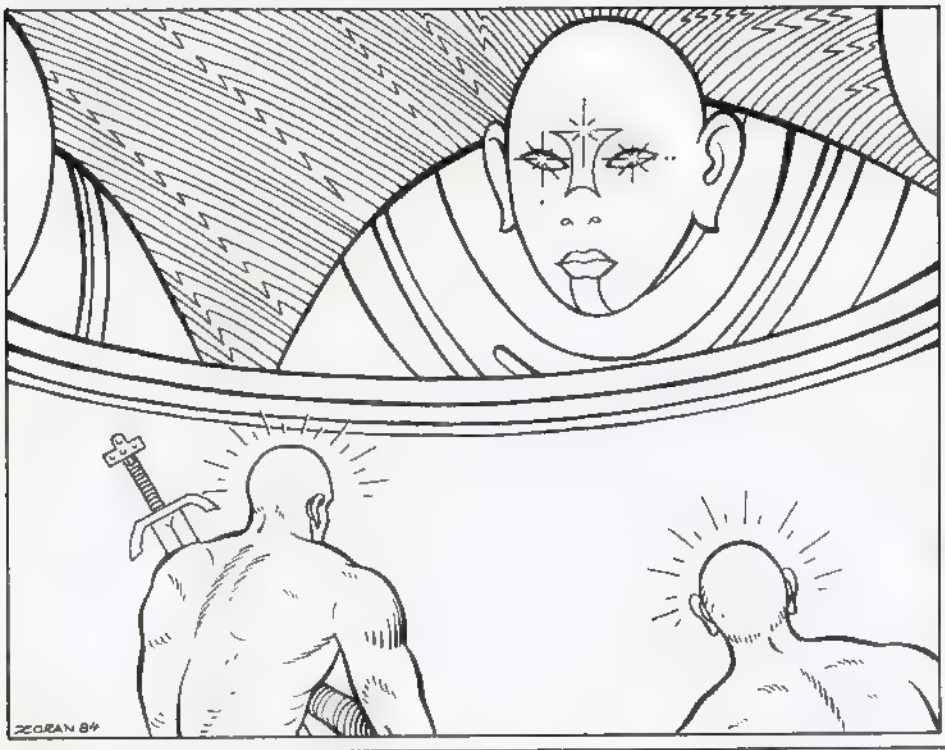
... AMEN!
ZOORAN 84
ZOOO

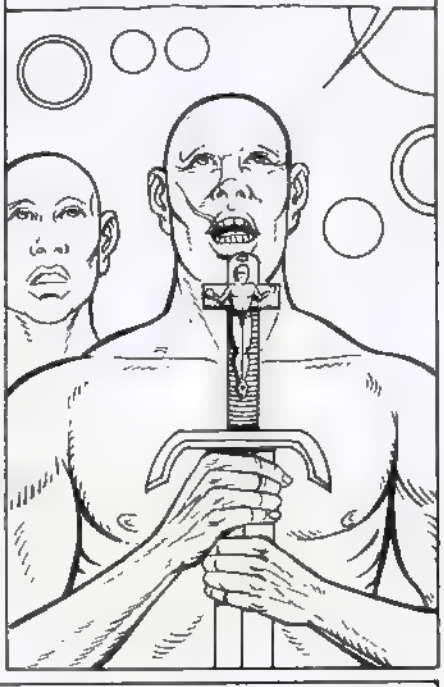
AAAAY

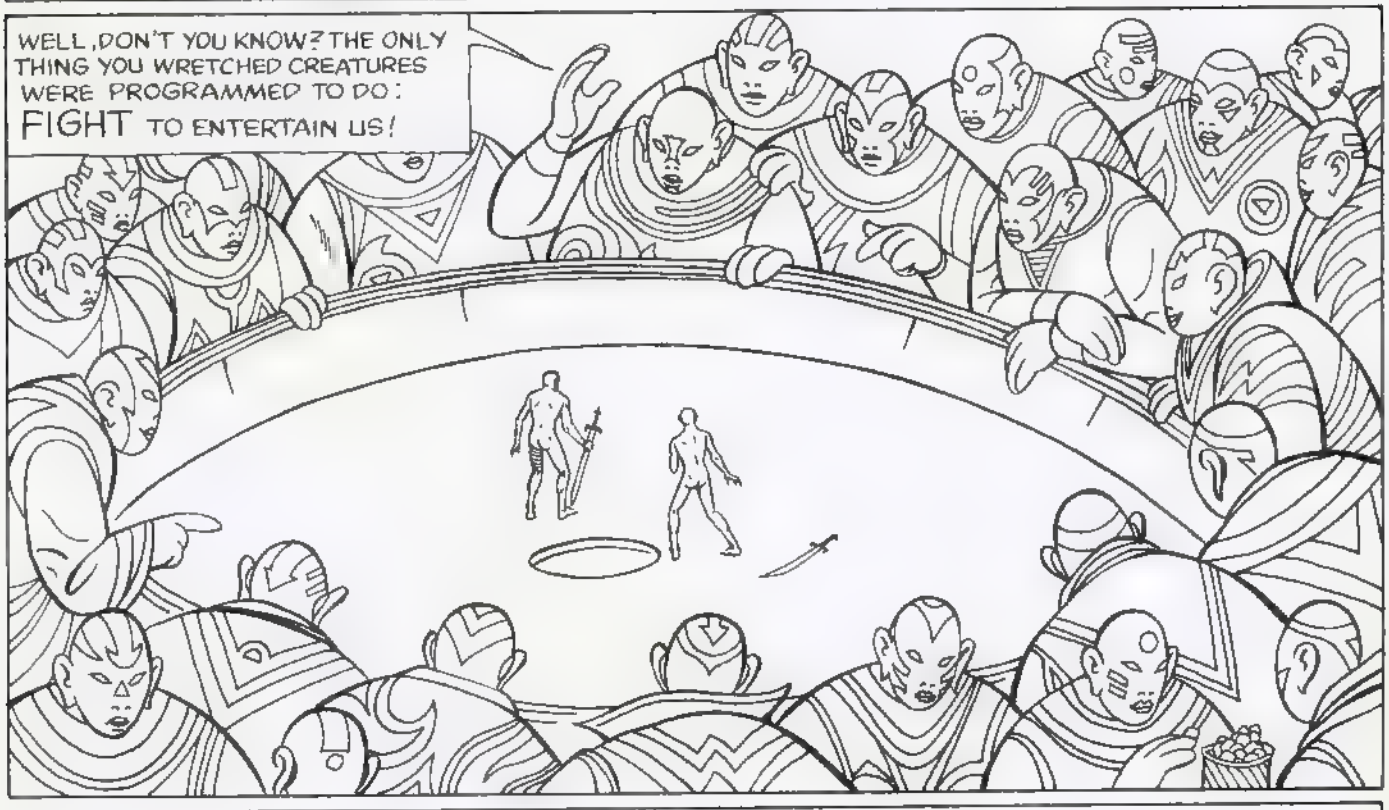
HAN!
IN THE NAME OF CHRIST AND THE HOLY VIRGIN DIE, YOU...
BUT...BUT HE IS JUST A BOY!
NO MORE! NO MORE KILLINGS IN THY NAME, OH LORD.
LET ME EMBRACE THIS INFIDEL...THIS BOY... AS MY BROTHER, THUS CHERISHING THEE...
???
...DEAR LORD, WITH LOVE...
...NOT WITH A SWORD...
!?!
ZORAN 84


HALLELUJAH!
??
?!?
"AND WE ARE CHAINED TO THIS MARBLE BLOCK OF BEING,
CHAINED, ETERNALLY CHAINED, ETERNALLY.
AND THE WORLDS DRAG US WITH THEM ON THEIR ROUNDS ...
FAP!
it
ZORAN 84

...HOWLING THEIR SONGS OF DEATH, AND WE ...







...WE ARE THE APES OF A COLD GOD."

KARL MARX

COBALT-60

BASED ON CHARACTERS BY VAUGHN BODĒ

ARTWORK BY MARK BODĒ

STORY BY LARRY TODD

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SYNOPSIS

FE 56, king of the Radio People, is dead. So is his queen, AU 80. To all appearances, they were killed by one of the ravaging bands of mutants who live in the wastelands beyond Radio City. Since their deaths, the new rulers, Strontium 90 and his prime minister, Polonium 210, have conducted a reign of terror against the increasingly violent and antagonistic mutants. The Holy Molders, priests of human genetics, seek out and purge any who show signs of even marginal mutation. Mutants themselves are slaughtered by the military, and sterilization edicts are issued. But, in one vital matter, Strontium is prepared to risk the goodwill of his strongest supporters. BBC, heiress to the Radio throne, is approaching maturity, and despite the disapproval of the priests and his advisers, Strontium intends to wed her.

However, unknown to any of them, a far better claimant to the throne still exists. Cobalt 60, the son of FE 56 and AU 80, was sent away to safety while he was still a child, and raised by a marginal mutant. Now, grown to manhood, he keeps his features hidden by a hood of white cloth and strikes for the mutants, without warning, killing those he was born to rule.

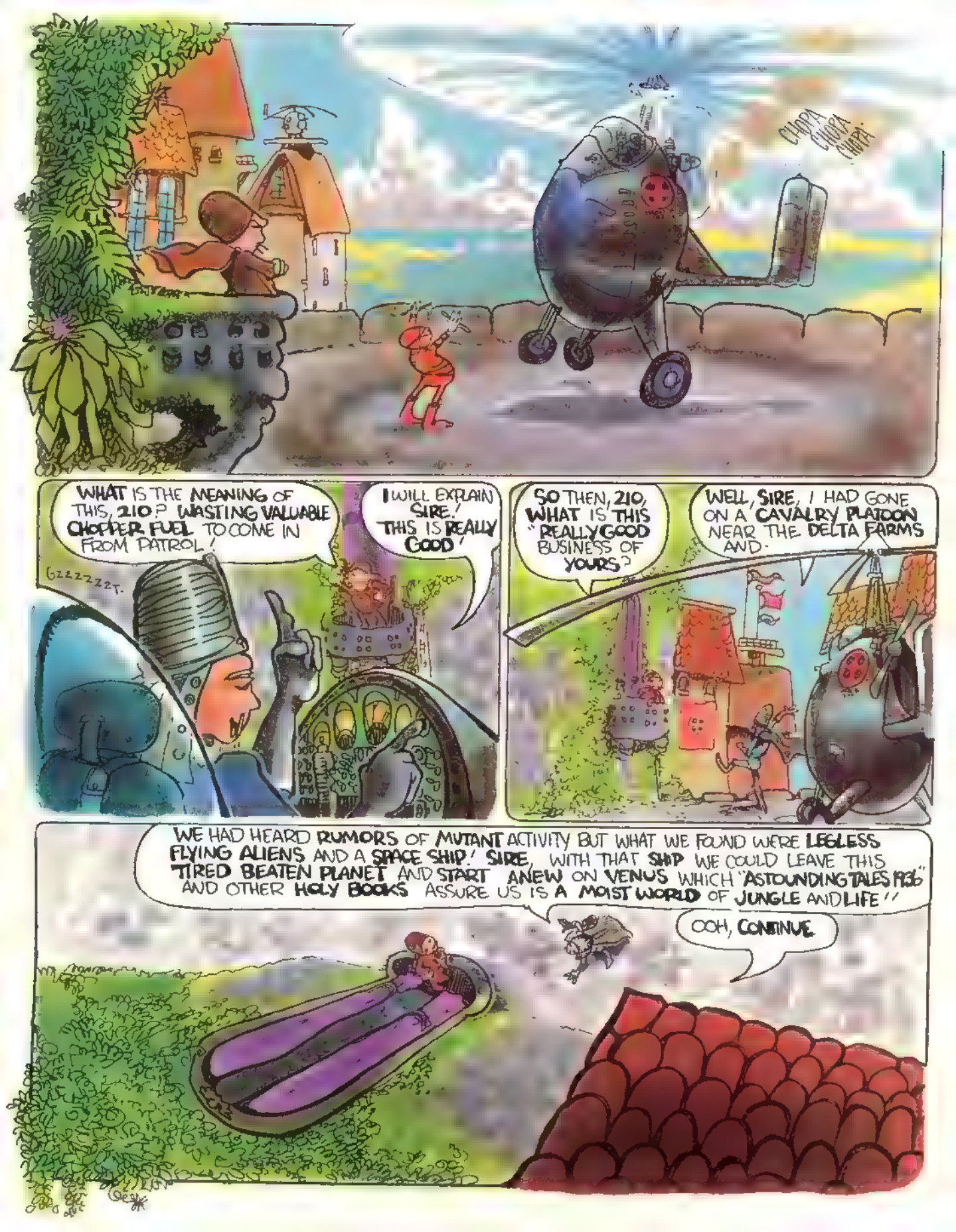
But Cobalt 60 has friends among the non-mutants—including Franklin Gothic Green, who is upset, for alients have been mining and destroying his precious archaeological dig sites. Worse, these aliens, the Bigeyes, have formed a temporary alliance with the Radio people, to seek ancient nuclear weapons and the lost wealth of the legendary IRS. To thwart them, Cobalt and Franklin must find new allies of their own.

THAT LOOKS LIKE A TROOP OF CROCKS. YOU STAY HERE...
GLADLY
HEY LOOK AT DAT! IT A RADIO MAN!
OH BOY I WILL EAT DAT GUY!
DEN I WILL EAT YOUR CHOW!!
WOT DA FUK YOU WILL!!
BLAM BLAM
I WILL EAT DESE GUYS!
DA FUK YOU WILL, DESE IS DA PROPERTY OF DA TROOP, WE WILL ALL EAT DEM, STARTIN WIF ME!
GENERAL HISSTORY..
COBALT 60!

© 1985 Barbara Bodé and Mark Bodé

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, DONCHA' KNOW DAT MY CROCKS WILL WANT TO EAT YOUS?!
SURE I DO BUT IF THEY TRY YOU WILL KILL THEM
HO,HO,HO! DAT IS RIGHT I PLUMB FORGOT!!
WELL HERE'S SOMETHING ELSE TO REMEMBER.
YESSSS?
REMEMBER I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE HOARD OF THE IRS AND HOW WE WOULD ATTACK RADIO MEN THERE TO EAT THEM?
NO..
WELL I DID! AND THEY'RE GOING THERE NOW! TOGETHER WE CAN GET RID OF MOST OF THESE RADIO SOLDIERS, AND ALL MUTANTS AND CROCKS WOULD BE SAFE AGAIN
HO,HO,HO! DAT DO SOUND PLENNY GOOD!
IT IS! YOU ALSO SAID YOUR CROCKS WOULD FOLLOW AND OBEY ME.
I DID?!
YOU DID BECAUSE THERE WILL BE LOTS TO EAT FOR EVERY BODY.
RIP
CHOMP
I MUST HAVE IF DERE IS FOOD FOR EVERYBODY!
WELL, IT'S A FOUR DAY MARCH SOUTH
WHICH WAY IS DA FOOD!! URP
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, JUST FOLLOW ME!
HO! CROCKS WE IS GOIN TA GET FOOD NOW!
NOT YET HISSTORY! WE DO IT TOMORROW DONT TALK ABOUT FOOD TO THEM TILL IM A SAFE DISTANCE AWAY!
GASP

WELL?
HE'LL DO IT.. I TOLD HIM HE AGREED TO DO IT, SO THEY'LL ALL FOLLOW US
THEY WON'T TRY TO EAT US WILL THEY?
SURE THEY WILL, BUT IF WE KILL ONE EACH TIME THEY TRY, THEY'LL BE TOO BUSY EATING EACH OTHER TO BOTHER US...
FOOT
FOOT
FOOT
FOOT
RADIO CITY
PONKA PONKA PONKA


CHOPA CHOPA CHOPA
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, 210? WASTING VALUABLE CHOPPER FUEL TO COME IN FROM PATROL!
I WILL EXPLAIN SIRE. THIS IS REALLY GOOD!
GZZZZZZT.
SO THEN, 210, WHAT IS THIS "REALLY GOOD BUSINESS OF YOURS?
WELL, SIRE, I HAD GONE ON A CAVALRY PLATOON NEAR THE DELTA FARMS AND-
WE HAD HEARD RUMORS OF MUTANT ACTIVITY BUT WHAT WE FOUND WERE LEGLESS FLYING ALIENS AND A SPACE SHIP! SIRE, WITH THAT SHIP WE COULD LEAVE THIS TIRED BEATEN PLANET AND START ANEW ON VENUS WHICH "ASTOUNDING TALES P136" AND OTHER HOLY BOOKS ASSURE US IS A MOIST WORLD OF JUNGLE AND LIFE"
OOH, CONTINUE

THE ALIENS ARE LED BY A BOMBASTIC JOKER NAMED CORDWAINER BIG EYE WHO TOLD ME HE WAS A PROFESSIONAL SCAVENGER HUNTING RUINED WORLDS FOR RAW MATERIALS.
SO I TOLD HIM ABOUT A SITE DOWN SOUTH WHERE IT IS POSSIBLE TO MOVE A GREAT NUMBER OF TROOPS IN ON THEM IN TOTAL SECRECY, TO SEIZE THEIR SHIP WHEN THEY LEAST EXPECT IT!
SO I HAVE TO PICK UP SOME MORE TROOPS AND RADIO LOPERS AND LAYOUT ATTACK PLANS PROMPTLY, SIRE...
I SEE.
WELL YOU CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN BUSY, UNLIKE ME, I'M BORED CRAZY COOPED UP IN HERE PERHAPS I SHALL ACCOMPANY YOU TO WITNESS THIS COUP
SUITS ME
BUT DO REMEMBER, SIRE, I'M GOING TO SCREW THESE HOT AIR BAGS. IT WOULD NOT BE WISE FOR YOU TO ALLOW THEM TO KNOW OF YOUR ROYAL RANK
WHY?!
I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO DEAL WITH A HOSTAGE SITUATION.
NO, I SUPPOSE YOUR RIGHT!!

IF I WENT AS A GENERAL MIGHT I GO THEN?
YOU CAN GO IN ANY CASE SIRE! JUST NOT AS YOURSELF
EEH! WHAT FUN IS THERE IN GOING THEN?
STAY THEN SIRE, BUT SIGN THIS ORDINANCE REQUEST FIRST...
THERE! I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING
I'M SURE YOU WILL, SIRE. I'LL BE ABOUT MY BUISNESS
THE NEXT DAY
AHH! SIRE YOU DECIDED TO COME
YES! AS YOUR EXECUTIVE AIDE 210! YOU'LL CALL ME 90, YES!

YES SIRE. AH.. 90..
VERY GOOD SHALL WE GO?
AH, 90... ONE THING.
YES, 210?
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD LEAVE THE HADATCHI THRONE AT HOME THE AIRBAGS MIGHT THINK IT STRANGE FOR ME TO HAVE AN AIDE WHO SITS ON A THRONE.
NO!
UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHALL I FORCE MYSELF TO DEPEND ON MY POOR LEGS FOR SUPPORT! IS THAT CLEAR!
AH YES, 90
90! IS THAT HOW YOU ADDRESS YOUR LEIGE"
UH. NO SIRE. SIGH
THAT'S BETTER LETS MOVE OUT.
SHGLINE!
ROTCH!
P. TOOY
GLISH DO'

COBALT 60 continues next issue

NOW IN THOSE
LONGER
A STRANGE AND DANGEROUS TIME
STRAIT OPPOSITE THE
A MATTER OF VENGEANCE
STORMMANE. YOU'RE OVER THERE I CAN FEEL IT!
TIME TO SETTLE OUR ACCOUNT!

story © 1985 Archie Goodwin artwork © 1985 Keith Buckler
main character visual concepts © 1985 Steve Dackman

TO THE PLEASED ROAR OF THE CROWD, JIHAD TAUN SLIPPED THROUGH HIS OPPONENT'S GUARD TO MAKE THE STRIKE ENDING THE MATCH AND THE DAY'S EVENTS.
FOR THIS WEEK, AS FOR THE PRECEDING THREE OR WAS IT FOUR? -- HE WAS CHAMPION SWORDSMAN OF THE CITY OF PANTHERS IN HIS CLASS.
THE FACT WAS THERE WERE MANY CONTESTS AND MANY CHAMPIONS.
THE ARENA WAS AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF REVENUE AND THE RULING BROTHERS LIKED TO PROVIDE MANY FAVORITES TO CHEER, SUPPORT... AND WAGER UPON.
STILL, JIHAD TUAN LIKED THE FEELING OF PRIDE AS HE MADE HIS VICTORY SALUTE TO THE JUDGES. HE LIKED THE ATTENTION WINNING BROUGHT HIM AFTER THE GAMES.
.. AT LEAST UNTIL HIS MENTOR, RETIRED GENERAL BHAGEETA, NOW AN ARENA JUDGE, SUDDENLY OVERTOOK HIM.
DID I SPEND MONTHS TRAINING A FOOL? DID I IMPART A LIFETIME OF FIGHTING SAVVY -- ACQUIRED AT GREAT RISK IN ACTUAL COMBAT -- TO A CUB WHO CAN'T COUNT?!
THIS WAS FIVE STRAIGHT WINS, JIHAD!
MY FELLOW JUDGE, THE PRIEST, WAS DELIGHTED. YOU KNOW THE BROTHERHOOD'S CONCESSION TO ASSURE THE GODS' FAVOR! YOU QUALIFIED FOR TEMPLE GUARD, FUZZSKULL!
B-BUT... TEMPLE GUARDS ARE.. GELDED!

YES!
EXCELLENT INSURANCE THAT THE VIRGIN SACRIFICES THEY ARE CHARGED TO PROTECT REMAIN VIRGINS. SOME SMALL CONSOLATION TO ME AS WELL--
-- FOR THE RETIREMENT PAY I LOST--
--BETTING ON YOUR OPPONENT!
GOOD LUCK IN YOUR NEW CAREER, MY BOY!
MORGAN STORMMANE HAD COME TO HATE THE CITY. FINE THAT THE PANTHERS HAD BROUGHT THIS PESTHOLE BACK TO LIFE AFTER THE GREAT DRYING OUT AS A CENTER FOR COMMERCE AND REVELRY.
NO ONE LIKED INDULGENCE MORE THAN STORMMANE
BUT THERE WAS TOO MUCH TO INDULGE IN.
PARTICULARLY TAVERNS AND WINE STALLS. SINCE SETTLING HERE AFTER A LONG WANDERING EXILE FROM HIS HOMELAND STORMMANE HAD BEEN DRINKING MORE OR LESS STEADILY.
IN TRUTH, HE DID NOT CARE OVERLY MUCH FOR BEING DRUNK.
BUT HE DISLIKED HANGOVERS EVEN MORE VIOLENTLY AND THUS
TO POSTPONE THE INEVITABLE PAIN OF TOO MUCH DRINKING HE CONTINUED DRINKING
AT ALL COST

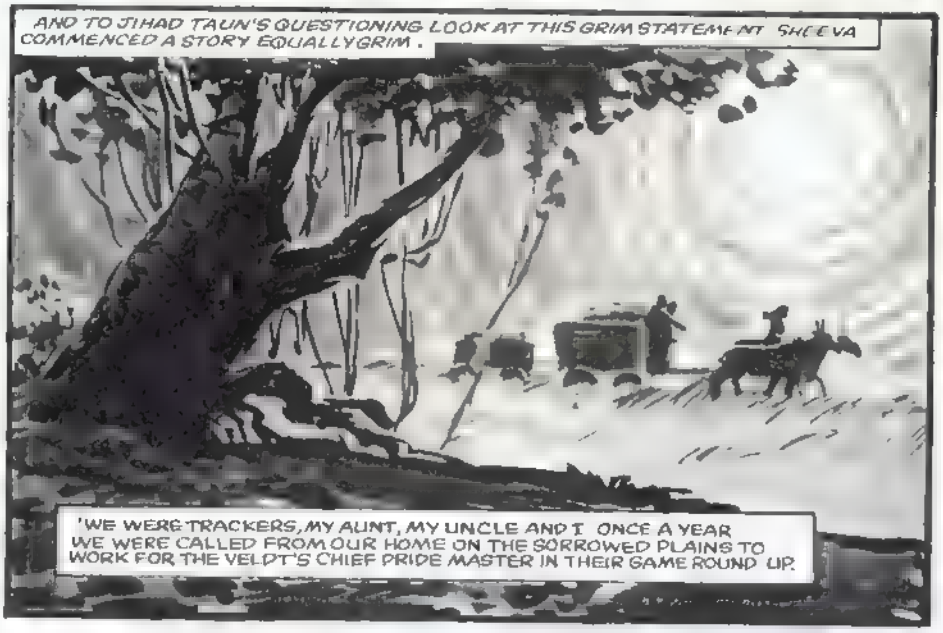
ENOUGH!
I'VE LIVED WITH BANISHMENT FROM THE VELDT FOR ACCIDENTALLY EATING A FEW HUMANS--
--I'VE SCRAPED OUT A LIVING BY SELLING MY SWORD TO EXTREMELY LOW BIDDERS--
--BUT IF I CAN'T EVEN DO SOMETHING I DISLIKE AS MUCH AS DRINKING IN PEACE--
...THIS DAMN CITY IS GOING TO PAY!
SHEEVA'S PLAN HAD DEPENDED ON DARKNESS AND DISGUISE, STEALING A TATTERED GARMENT HAD BEEN NO PROBLEM. SOME THINGS, HOWEVER, EVEN THE NIGHT COULD NOT COVER
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU TWO?! WHEN WE DIDN'T SEE A TAIL SWISHIN' UNDER HER ROBE I KNEW WE HAD SOMETHIN'! HOW CAN YOU LET ONE LITTLE HAIRLESS BITCH GIVE YOU SO MUCH--
T-TROUBLLLL-L-LE?!!

ANY FEMALE SO GOOD AT FIGHTIN' PROBABLY'S DONE A LOT ELSE BESIDES! TEMPLE PRIESTS WILL ACCEPT A HUMAN FOR SACRIFICE
--BUT IF SHE AIN'T A VIRGIN, THEY WON'T PAY!
I'M GONNA KILL HER AN END THIS!
THIS WAS TAKING TOO LONG SINCE SWIMMING THE STRAIT, SHEEVA HAD FELT HER SENSE OF STORMMANE'S PRESENCE GROW. THE MONSTROUS SLAYER OF ALL THE FAMILY SHE HAD EVER KNOWN COULD NOT POSSIBLY ELUDE HER.
IF ONLY SHE COULD SOLVE HER IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS.
RUSHING TO PURSUE PLEASURES THAT WOULD BE SACRIFICED IN HIGHER SERVICE TO THE TEMPLE GUARD, JIHAD TAUN FOUND CONCERN OVER WHAT WAS ABOUT TO BE LOST--
- HAD A PRONOUNCED AFFECT ON USAGE WHILE ALL STILL REMAINED
NOW, THE YOUNG CHAMPION MOODILY DEPARTED THE HOUSE OF INFINITE TEMPTATION AND ITS UNSYMPATHETIC PROPRIETRESS...
- WEIGHING THE VIRTUES OF FLIGHT FROM THE CITY OVER THE DISADVANTAGES OF BEING CURSED FOR LIFE BY THE GODS-
STANDARD PUNISHMENT FOR DESERTING TEMPLE DUTY.
AND WHILE DEEP IN SUCH CONTEMPLATION...
STOP HER! HALT THE BALDFLESHED MURDERESS!
I ONLY DEFENDED MYSELF!
THEY WANTED TO SELL ME FOR A SACRIFICE IN SOME TEMPLE!
I KNOW IT'S HARD FOR YOU TO TRUST A HUMAN BUT--

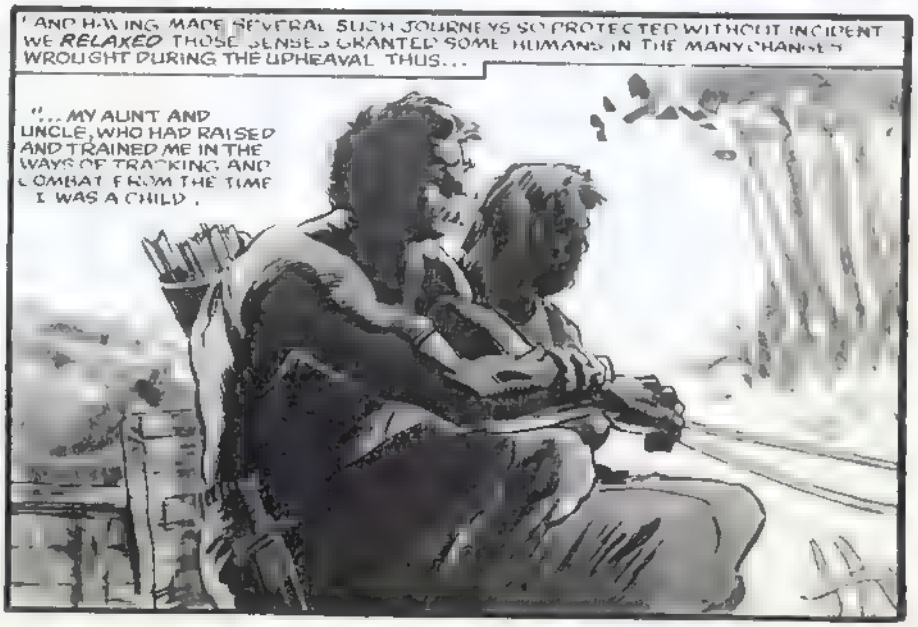
THE TEMPLE HAS BEEN GRANTED MORE THAN ITS SHARE OF SACRIFICES TODAY!
BARBARIANS! THE BROTHERHOOD GRANTS EVEN HAIRLESS ONES THE RIGHT TO SAFELY DO BUSINESS HERE!
A DAMNED GLADIATOR! AND IDEALISTIC! THE WENCH ALONE WAS TROUBLE THIS IS CATASTROPHE!

I APOLOGIZE. THE GODS SMILE ON OUR CITY, BUT ACQUIRING VIRGIN SACRIFICES TO KEEP THEM HAPPY SOMETIMES CREATES UNSAVORY SITUATIONS!
AS LONG AS YOU'RE ON LEGITIMATE BUSINESS, I'M SURE THERE'LL BE NO FURTHER INCIDENTS.
UH. JUST WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS?

REVENGE'


AND TO JIHAD TAUN'S QUESTIONING LOOK AT THIS GRIM STATEMENT SHEEVA COMMENCED A STORY EQUALLY GRIM.
'WE WERE TRACKERS, MY AUNT, MY UNCLE AND I ONCE A YEAR WE WERE CALLED FROM OUR HOME ON THE SORROWED PLAINS TO WORK FOR THE VELDT'S CHIEF PRIDE MASTER IN THEIR GAME ROUND UP.

'THIS WAS PART OF A TRUCE BETWEEN THE BORDER ISLANDS ENDING SOME OF THE BLOODIEST FIGHTING BETWEEN ANIMAL AND HUMAN SINCE THE GREAT DRIVING OUT. IN RETURN FOR LENDING OUR ABILITIES AS GAME SENSORS...
'WE WERE GUARANTEED PEACE AND SAFE UNRESTRICTED PASSAGE THROUGH THE VELDT


'AND HAVING MADE SEVERAL SUCH JOURNEYS SO PROTECTED WITHOUT INCIDENT WE RELAXED THOSE SENSES GRANTED SOME HUMANS IN THE MANY CHANGES WROUGHT DURING THE UPHEAVAL THUS...
"...MY AUNT AND UNCLE, WHO HAD RAISED AND TRAINED ME IN THE WAYS OF TRACKING AND COMBAT FROM THE TIME I WAS A CHILD.

"...FELL PREY TO THE SNARLING, RAGING MONSTER, *MORGAN STORMMANE!*

"THE ATTACK WAS SWIFT, BRUTAL, AND SENSELESS.

"I TRIED TO HELP THEM BUT MY STEED WENT WILD WITH PANIC AND CHARGED AWAY

"THIS SAVED *ME*... BUT LEFT MY FAMILY TO BE *DEVOURED* BY A BEAST REVERTED TO THE LEVEL OF SUB-SPECIES...

"...UNCHANGED BY THE UPHEAVAL.

"A BEAST FIT ONLY TO BE HUNTED, SLAIN, AND FEASTED UPON!"

BUT...THAT WOULD DRAG *YOU* TO *HIS* LEVEL! AND THESE DAYS, WHO CAN RIGHTFULLY EAT *WHO* IS TOUCHY! SO MANY LOCAL LAWS...CUSTOMS...

OUR CUSTOM IS THAT ONE CANNOT *MARRY* WHILE A WRONG TO YOUR FAMILY GOES UN-AVENGED! I HAVE A *BETROTHED* GROWING IMPATIENT!

FORTUNATELY, STORMMANE IS *NEAR*..

..AND SO IS HIS *DEATH!*

MORGAN STORMMANE WAS NOT PLEASED WITH THE RETRIBUTION HE HAD THUS FAR BROUGHT UPON THE CITY OF PANTHERS

HIS ASSAULTS HAD BEEN LIMITED TO DRINKING EMPORIUMS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS, WHERE THEY SCARCELY EXCEEDED TRADITIONAL BEHAVIOR.

WORSE YET.. THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SEEMED TO BE MAKING HIM SOBER.

COULD THE PAIN THE AGONY OF A HANGOVER BE FAR BEHIND?
A HUMAN, IS IT? YOUR KIND IS ALWAYS CAUSING ME GRIEF! NEVER KNEW ABOUT DRINKING--
TIL ONE OF YOU DAREDEVILS DEMONS INTRODUCED ME TO THE HABIT ONE MISBEGOTTEN DAY ON THE VELDT--
- BY SELLING ME FOUR JUGS OF TAINTED MEAD!
DISTRACTIONS! HUMANS WOULD ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE FOR HIS WRATH. THIS NIGHT HE WOULD SATISFY HIS THIRST FOR REVENGE AGAINST A CORRUPT VALLEY AND THE TEMPTATIONS IT SET FOR UNWARY INNOCENTS SUCH AS HIMSELF.
AND SO, MASTER NOTED IN THE DISTANCE BY THE FIRST HALF-LIGHT OF DAWN, HE AT LAST SAW A TARGET WORTHY OF HIS QUEST.

AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGEMENT, JIHAD TAUN HAD STAYED WITH THE H. MAVE FEMALE. SURELY HER OBSESSION WITH REVENGE COULD ONLY LEAD TO TROUBLE. STILL, SOMETHING ABOUT IT FASCINATED HIM. YET IF THAT SOMETHING DIDN'T BECOME CLEAR SOON...
STORMMANE DOESN'T HIDE HIS TRAIL, SHEEVA. BUT I CAN'T FOLLOW MUCH LONGER. I'VE AN...UH...APPOINTMENT AT OUR TEMPLE THAT--
AMONG THE MONSTER'S VICTIMS...! THAT ONE APPEARS TO BE H-HUMAN!
APPEARS...?! ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?
THE SORROWED PLAIN IS NOT HEAVILY POPULATED. BEYOND MY UNCLE AND MY BETROTHED--BROSK THE MEAD BREWER--
--I'VE SEEN SO FEW MEN AND NONE LOOKED SO PLEASING AS THIS ONE SO..
...PRETTY!
JIHAD EXPLAINED THAT, WHILE STANDARDS OF BEAUTY VARIED AMONG THE SPECIES, THIS HUMAN WAS, TO HIS KNOWLEDGE, UNREMARKABLE. HE WAS JUST BROACHING THE NOTION THAT PERHAPS MEN OF SHEEVA'S HOMELAND WERE REMARKABLY UGLY, WHEN
INFAMY! DISASTER! A MONSTER IN THE TEMPLE!
TOPPLING OUR SACRED SHRINES.. SLAUGHTERING OUR LOYAL GUARDS. SOMEONE HELP AGAINST THIS DEFILER. HELP!
IT WAS THE HIGH PRIEST PWASHIIR, ARENA JUDGE, RECRUITER OF GLADIATORS FOR TEMPLE DUTY, AND OFFICATOR AT THE TRADITIONAL GELDING CEREMONY WHICH ALWAYS BEGAN SUCH DUTY.
JIHAD TAUN!
THE GODS HAVE NOT FORSAKEN US! TO THE TEMPLE, CHAMPION! CAST OUT THE MAD LION WHO RAMPAGES THERE!
HOLINESS...I I AM NOT YET A MEMBER OF THE GUARD...
.. I STILL HAVE SEVERAL HOURS BEFORE THE INITIATION...AND
ALL OTHER OBLIGATIONS CAN WAIT! SLAY THE TEMPLE DESECRATOR NOW!
YOU ARE THE GODS' INSTRUMENT OF VENGEANCE, HURRY!
JIHAD WAS ALREADY MOVING WHEN HE REALIZED HE HAD NO NOTION OF WHAT HAD BECOME OF SHEEVA ..

THEN, HE WAS INSIDE THE TEMPLE AND HAD OTHER THINGS TO OCCUPY HIS THOUGHTS
IN THE ARENA, HE HAD NEVER BATTLED A LION. THEY COMPETED IN A DIFFERENT WEIGHT AND STRENGTH CLASS. THE SIGHTS GREETING HIM NOW IMPRESSED JIHAD TAUN MIGHTILY WITH THE WISDOM OF THAT POLICY
WHAT DID THE HIGH PRIEST EXPECT OF HIM? HADN'T ALL THE GUARDS STREWN ABOUT BEEN ARENA CHAMPIONS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER JUST AS HE WAS? WHERE WAS THE DAMN LION ANYWAY?
THEN A SCENT STUNG HIS NOSTRILS
IT WAS FAMILIAR, BUT STRONGER THAN IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN
WINE! THE MONSTER'S DOWN IN THE VAULTS! I SUPPOSE A CREATURE WHO STILL DEVOURS HUMANS ISN'T LIKELY TO BE PUT OFF BY ANYTHING CHEAP AND BITTER AS CEREMONIAL WINE!
SEEMS TO HAVE SPILLED MORE THAN HE'S DRUNK.
BUT IF HE'S CARRYING A BELLYFUL OF THIS, HE SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO GIVE TOO MUCH OF A BATTLE!
AND, WITH A PRAYER THAT THE GODS GRANTED HIM ACCURATE REASONING AND NOT EXCESSIVE OPTIMISM, JIHAD PLUNGED ON.
... TO THE BEACH JUST BEYOND THE TEMPLE'S CELLAR DOOR.

THE THIRD KEG DID IT. FEARING AN ONSET OF SOBRIETY AFTER HIS WILD EXERTIONS IN THE TEMPLE, MORGAN STORMMANE HAD SWIFTLY DRAINED A KEG OF WINE. THEN, A SECOND AS INSURANCE. WHY HAD HE WANTED A THIRD?

STORMMANE COULD NOT REMEMBER. HE ONLY KNEW IT SMOTE HIM WITH SUCH WRETCHED NAUSEA HE WAS SENT STAGGERING OUTSIDE TO THE SEA.

HE WAS THROBBINGLY SICK. HIS VENGEANCE UPON THE CITY OF PANTHERS HAD COME TOO LATE. MORGAN STORMMANE FACED THE BRUTAL TRUTH. THE THROES OF A HANGOVER WERE UPON HIM. MATTERS COULD GROW NO WORSE.

MONSTER! DEFILER OF TEMPLES! TURN AND FACE THE GODS' OWN AVENGER!

IT HAD BEEN JIHAD TAUN'S THEORY THAT A LOUD YELL AND SURPRISE CHARGE MIGHT CAUSE THE DRUNK SODDEN OFFENDER OF DEITIES AND DESTROYER OF WINE STALLS TO LOSE HIS BALANCE AND TOPPLE INTO THE SEA.

INSTEAD

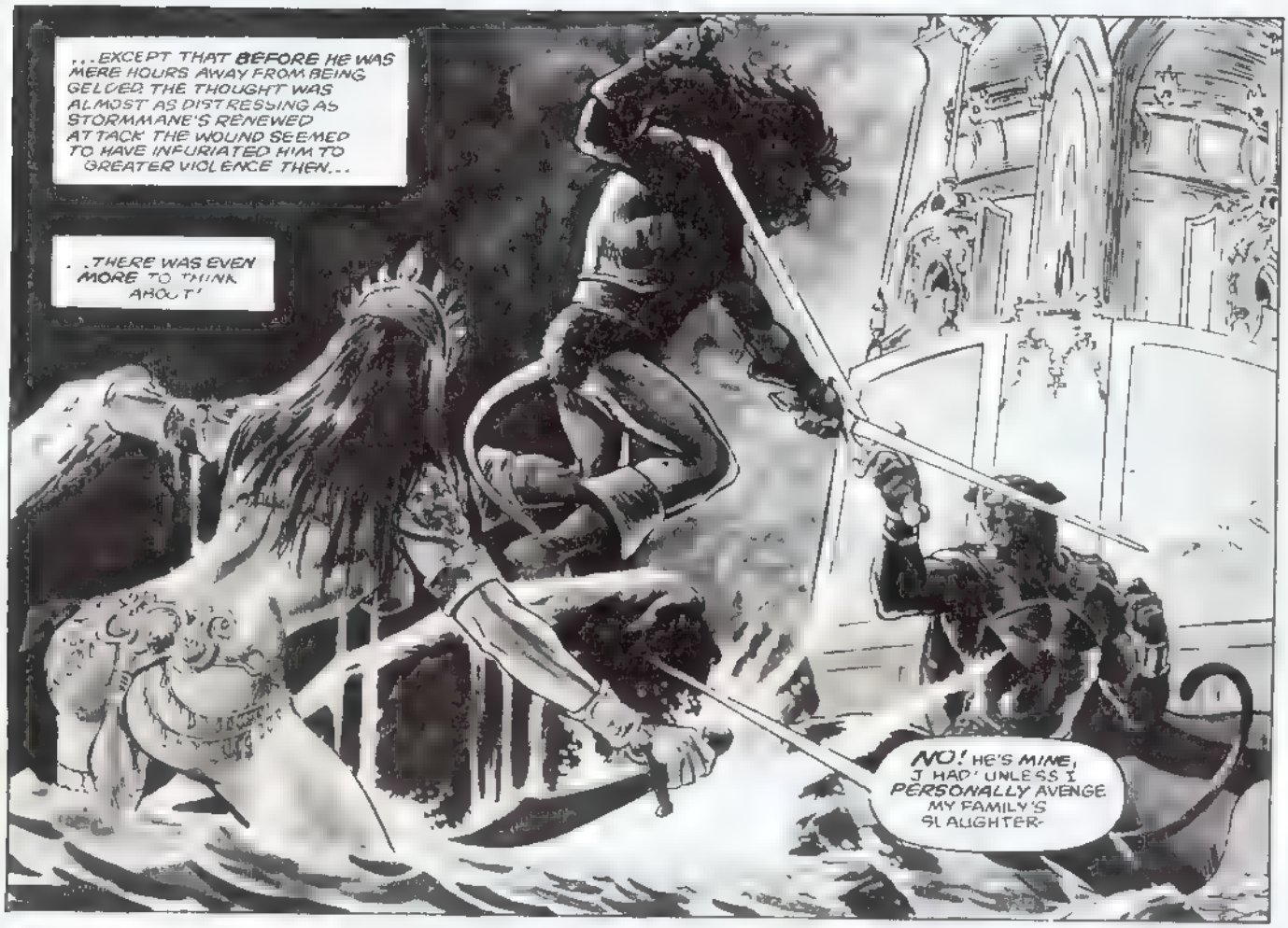
.. THE LION ROARED MIGHTILY AND BROUGHT UP HIS SWORD!

STORMMANE HAD NEVER KNOWN SUCH PAIN. HIS HEAD WAS READY TO BURST LIKE A SAUSAGE SKIN AND HERE WAS SOME YOUNG FOOL SCREECHING AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS AND NOISILY CLANGING SWORDS

THE ONLY RELIEF SEEMED TO BE TO SWIFTLY SLAY HIM. IF HIS BANSHEE FOE WOULD BUT STAY IN FOCUS.

THE STRENGTH AND FURY OF THE MONSTER'S ATTACK WAS AWESOME, JIHAD TAUN NOTED, BUT STRANGELY INACCURATE. SEEING AN OPENING. . HE STRUCK!

BLOOD! THE PANTHER GLADIATOR SMELLED VICTORY. STORMMANE'S DESECRATIONS WOULD BE AVENGED. ALL WOULD BE AS BEFORE...


...EXCEPT THAT BEFORE HE WAS MERE HOURS AWAY FROM BEING GELDED THE THOUGHT WAS ALMOST AS DISTRESSING AS STORMMANE'S RENEWED ATTACK THE WOUND SEEMED TO HAVE INFURIATED HIM TO GREATER VIOLENCE THEN...
...THERE WAS EVEN MORE TO THINK ABOUT'
NO! HE'S MINE, I HAD' UNLESS I PERSONALLY AVENGE MY FAMILY'S SLAUGHTER-

--I'LL NEVER BE FREE TO MARRY MY BETROTHED'

THIS NEW SCREECHING MADE MORGAN STORMMANE LEAP WITH PAIN IT SAVED

BUT IN NO WAY BROKE WHAT NOW SEEMED AN UNENDING CHAIN OF CATASTROPHE FOR THE EXILE FROM THE VELDT

SWIMMING IS NOT SOMETHING WE FELINES DO OFTEN...OR WELL! HE'LL DROWN IN THOSE CURRENTS!
GOOD! IT'S STILL BY MY HAND AND STILL REVENGE BY THE CLUTCH OF THE SORROWED PLAINS
AND IN THE EYES OF HIGH FOREST PANTHERESS, I MISLED YOU! THE LONGER STORMMANE LIVES--
THE LONGER I LISTEN HERE MAN, A TEMPLEHEARD ANGEL ALL THE SACRIFICE THAT ENTAILS!
YOU'RE GOING TO THROW THOSE IN AND SAVE HIM?!
JIHAD TAUN, I OWE YOU MUCH FOR COMING TO MY AID--
--BUT I CAN'T LET YOU ROB ME OF RETRIBUTION AND RUIN MY CHANCE FOR HAPPINESS WITH BRUSH THE WEAL BREWER
COURAGE, JIHAD TAUN! I HAVE COME WITH REINFORCEMENTS! ARCHERS...LOOSE A HAIL OF ARROWS!
IF THE MONSTER HAS A HUMAN ACCOMPLICE ATTACKING OUR CHAMPION HE MUST BE HIDING NEARBY

MORGAN STORMMANE HAD HAD ENOUGH. A HANG OVER WAS CALAMITOUS, DROWNING WAS WORSE TO HAVE SOMEONE BOUNCE A WINE KEG OFF YOUR HEAD WHILE YOU WERE SUFFERING BOTH WAS BEYOND ENDURANCE
NO MORE! YOU'VE TRIED TO DESTROY ME AND FAILED! NOW I STRIKE BACK! THERE IS NOTHING MORE YOU CAN DO! NOTHING!
AT TEMPTING TO DISLODGE SHEEVA FROM HIS BACK, JIHAD HAD DISLODGED HIS OWN FEET FROM THE ROCKS...
. TOPPLING JUST AHEAD OF THE CLOUD OF ARROWS FIRED BY HIS RESCUERS. HE BURST TO THE SURFACE, REALIZING HOW NARROWLY THEY HAD ESCAPED DEATH . AND HOW TEMPORARILY.
SHEEVA STORMMANE! DON'T--
YOU! STILL ALIVE . ?! THEN MY BLADE WILL FINALLY DRINK THE BLOOD OF MY FAMILY'S DEVOURER!
ONCE I DEVOURED HUMANS GIRL OUT OF MY HEAD ON TAINTED MEAD! BUT DRIVEN BY YOUR YELLING AND ASSAULTS--
--I MAY DO SO AGAIN UNSPURRED BY BROSK, THE MEAD BREWER'S POISONOUS WARES!
BROSK?! MY BETROTHED.. ?! WHAT
THE MONSTER STILL SURVIVES! EMPTY YOUR QUIVERS, ARCHERS!
THIS TIME HE AND HIS COHORT ARE CLEAR TARGETS!

HOLINESS... SO AM I! YOUR CHAMPION! HOLD YOUR ARROWS AND LET ME FINISH THE TASK OF VENGEANCE YOU DEMANDED!
AND WITH A STRONG KICK... JIHAD TAUN LAUNCHED HIS CASK TOWARD MORGAN STORMMANE AND SHEEVA OF THE SORROWED PLAINS!
LOOK! COULD THE GODS HAVE A BETTER AVENGER?! THE YOUNG ROGUE'S SLAMMED RIGHT INTO THE VILLAINS!
BUT THAT'S KNOCKIN THE LOT OF THEM INTO THE SWIFTEST CURRENTS OF HARTSTUNG STRAIT--
...THEY'LL BE CARRIED OUT OF RANGE!
IN FACT, DESPITE A PARTING VOLLEY FROM THE LESS RESTRAINED IN THE CROWD, THEY WERE CARRIED SO FAR FROM THE CITY OF PANTHERS...
R BUCKLER '84
FEW THERE EVER HEARD OF THEM AGAIN
NO! ISN'T IT CLEAR, SHEEVA? SLAY STORMMANE AND YOU MUST FULFILL YOUR BETROTHAL BOND... MARRIAGE TO THE MAN WHO CAUSED STORMMANE TO EAT YOUR AUNT AND UNCLE!
BUT...
I'VE BEEN AFTER HIM SO LONG! WHAT ABOUT MY REVENGE AND YOURS?
IF EITHER ARE FULFILLED THEN EACH OF US FACE EVEN WORSE OBLIGATIONS, I FEAR, SHEEVA. WE HAVE TO PROTECT MORGAN STORMMANE...
...FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.
AND I WELCOME YOUR COMPANY... ALL THAT EXCITEMENT YOU TWO STIRRED UP HAS CURED MY HANGOVER!
SO THEY TRAVELED FAR AND WIDE AVOIDING PLACES WITH TOO MANY TAVERNS, FAVORING THOSE WITH HUMAN MALE CITIZENS SUBSTANTIALLY MORE HANDSOME THAN MEN OF THE SORROWED PLAINS... AND LEAVING ALL MATTERS OF VENGEANCE UNRESOLVED.

LITTLE OTIS'S 5¢ RIDE
THERE HASN'T BEEN A SATURDAY THAT I DON'T THINK OF YOU. AFTER THE MATINEE, WHAT WITH ADMISSION, HOT DOG, POPCORN, SNO-CONE, JUJUBEES AND...
...MALTED MILK BALLS, YOU STILL HAD FIFTEEN CENTS LEFT. SODAS WERE ONLY A DIME THEN, AND...
...THOUGH IT SEEMS LIKE IT WAS A LONG, LONG TIME AGO...
...YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED ALL THAT MUCH.
EVEN BACK THEN... YOU COULDN'T BRING YOURSELF HOME WITH AS MUCH AS A NICKEL TO SPARE.

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"BURNED A HOLE IN YOUR POCKET," THEY USED TO SAY..
"AND ONE DAY," YOUR DAD USED TO WARN
"ONE DAY THAT BOY...
"... WILL HAVE TO LEARN THE VALUE OF A DOLLAR."
ONE DAY YOU MIGHT...
HOLY MOLEY!
...BUT IT SURE WOULDN'T BE ON A SATURDAY!
KAKA-CHUNKA KAKA-CHUNKA-KAKA

KAKA CHUNKA-KAKA-CHUNKA-
CHUNKA-KAKA CHUNKA-KA
CHUNKA-KA
NOPE, SATURDAY WAS MADE FOR ADVENTURE, AND YOU KNEW OF A TOWN... NOT THAT FAR AWAY... WHERE THE BANK WAS ALWAYS BEING ROBBED BY THE INFAMOUS BOYLE BROTHERS. NOW, ALTHOUGH...

...THEY HAD NEVER BEEN SUCCESSFUL, THEY WERE ALWAYS GAME.
KAKA-CHUNKA-KAKA-CHU
HELP! HELP! THE BANK'S A'BEIN' ROBBED AGAIN!
QUIT YER YAMMERIN', OR SO HELP ME, I'LL HIT YA WITH THIS HERE LOADED PISTOL!
UH-OH! HERE COMES LITTLE OTIS...!
MERCY! LITTLE OTIS IS A'COMIN', LANCE! WHADD'LL WE DO?
WELL, YOU TWO COULD GIVE YERSELVES UP AN' AH COULD TAKE TH' MONEY AN' SNEAK OUT TH' BACK... THEN WE COULD MEET UP IN, SAY, THIRTY YEARS AN' SPLIT TH--
NO!
BLAM!
NO! CHANGED M'MIND! WE'LL FIGHT! GUN HIM, YOU RANNIES... HE'S JUST ONE BOY!
MISSED 'IM! DURN IT!
GIT OUTTA TH' WAY, FESTER... LEMME HAVE A SHOT!
BWOW!
MISSED AGAIN! DURN!
BWAM!
AND AGAIN! DURN, DURN!
KA-PWWWING!
KERCHOW!
DURN! YA BUMPED M'ARM!
DID NOT!
DID TOO!
DID NOT!

AND THEY ALWAYS UNDERESTIMATED WHAT A BOY...
WIRRRRRRRRL
...WITH A NEW BOX OF CAPS COULD DO!
WIRRRRRRRRRRL
KATOW! KA-TOW!
KAK
CHUNKA
KATOW!
KABLING!
WHAT SHOOTIN'... LITTLE OTIS HAS DONE SHOT OFF MA' TRIGGER THUMB!
KER-BLOOM! KA-PLOW!
JEHOSOPHAT!... PARR IS RIGHT! HE'S DONE SHOT MA' GUN APART!
MINE, TOO!...LET'S GIVE OURSELVES UP AFORE HE SHOOTS OUR BELT BUCKLES OFF!
WE SURRENDER, LITTLE OTIS. WE'LL GO LOCK OURSELVES UP RIGHT NOW!
KAKA-CHUNKA-KAKA

AND THEN, JUST A SECOND OR TWO LATER...
WELL, YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN, LITTLE OTIS. ER... OAT. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU SAVED OUR BANK NOW... EIGHT? NINE?
ELEVEN!
AND NOT ONCE WAS OUR FANCY-SMANCY MARSHAL ANYWHERE TO BE FOUND!
WHAT ABOUT THE RUNAWAY STAGE COACHES? LITTLE OTIS SAVES US ALMOST EVERY WEEK, WHILE OUR MARSHAL IS OFF SOMEWH--
THERE'S TALK, COME NEXT ELECTION, LITTLE OTIS WOULD MAKE A GREAT FULL-TIME LAWM...
HA-HA-HA! WHAT KIDDERS YOU TOWNFOLK ARE! ANYWAY, OAT, IT IS MY JOB... ER, DUTY... AH...
... HONOR... MY HONOR TO PRESENT YOU WITH THIS DEPUTY...
... MARSHAL BADGE AND THIS CASH REWARD TOTALING...
CLICK
SO WHILE YOU MAY NOT HAVE EVER LEARNED THE VALUE OF A DOLLAR...
... YOU DO KNOW JUST HOW FAR A NICKEL WILL GO.